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## STORIES

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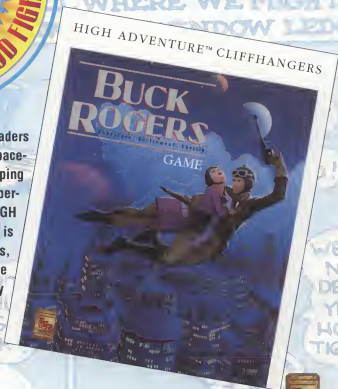
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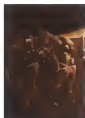


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## STORIES

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# Plasthis, Plasthat

Kim Mohan

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By the nature of the genre, science fiction writers have a lot of freedom. They can create settings, types of characters, and situations that, as far as we know, don't really exist. And as part of the process of creation, they can make up new words to describe those new ideas.

But with freedom comes responsibility—and a lot of the new words I see in manuscripts that come across my desk are . . . well, let's just say *I* wouldn't want to be responsible for them. It's a mystery to me why some writers, with all the sounds and syllables of the English language to choose from, are content to settle for new words that are either downright glibberish or so unimaginative in concept that they would have been better left unborn.

First, the glibberish. There are millions of ways to combine the letters of the English alphabet into words that can be easily pronounced. Even if I'm not saying a word out loud as I read it, I don't appreciate stumbling over a collection of consonants that I can't articulate inside my head. Most often, new-word glibberish shows up in the names attached to aliens and where they hail from. I call this "Scrabble naming," and I know I've found it when I read something like "Xtchnil was a member of the race of db'ytssi, a native of the planet Fzujm."

Fortunately, good writers don't create glibberish. Unfortunately, a lot of other writers who hope to be good haven't yet realized that it takes more—a *lot* more—than strange new

words to make a mediocre story into something that isn't mediocre.

But unimaginative new words are even worse than glibberish, in a way; because they *are* pronounceable, sometimes they don't draw as much attention to themselves and they can slip insidiously into a reader's consciousness. Because it's my job to read carefully, I try to be sensitive to new words, and I don't let one into my lexicography unless I'm satisfied that it's necessary and understandable.

One of my pet peeves is the group of words I call "the plas family." And "family" is appropriate, because when the plas(es) (plasse?) show up, they show up in bunches. I've read a few stories that take place in a futuristic or otherworldly setting where plastic is alloyed with just about any other material you can think of. "Plasglas" is popular, and it may be one of the most legitimate made-up substances. But take the process one step farther, and things start to get really curious:

Why make the walls of a building out of plastel when steel is stronger and probably cheaper?

Why use plaswood for furniture? If wood is scarce, then why wouldn't plain old plastic do?

One of the hardest to figure out is plascrete. If you want pavement with the durability of concrete, *use* concrete. If you want flexibility to prevent cracking and potholes, then use a super-tough plastic.

The list goes on: I've seen plaspaer, plasbestos, plasphalt, plasvinyl (think about that one), and a few oth-

ers that don't occur to me at the moment. One I haven't seen is a hybrid of plastic and plaster, which seems like it might be a useful thing. But I imagine no one wants to invent it because they can't figure out what to call it: "plasplaster" is a little silly, and "plaster" defeats the purpose.

All of these plas-things *can* exist in a fictional context; my objection is not with their plausibility but with their necessity. Most writers who use the plas-words and others of that ilk do so without bothering to take a sentence or two to explain (for instance) why plasglas is better for a certain purpose than either plastic or glass. Make me understand why you needed to use the word, and I'll believe that the word deserves to be there. Otherwise, I'll see it as a bit of gratuitous science-fictional decoration, and I won't like it.

For the sake of contrast and comparison, I'll mention that one of the stories in this issue contains a made-up word that's everything a made-up word should be. The word itself is evocative (in other words, it hints at what it means), and it describes a type of character and a concept for which no word exists in the English language (in other words, it's necessary). The word is not explicitly defined within the story, but the author has used it in other work—and once I learned that fact, I had no problem with letting the word stand the way it was written. It sounds like it ought to be a word, even if it's really not, and that's good enough for me. ♦

# Reflections

## Robert Silverberg

There's been a certain elegiac tone to these columns this summer, a harkening back to earlier times, old memories of the science-fiction field that used to be. Undoubtedly the deaths last year of those two colossi of our genre, Isaac Asimov and Fritz Leiber, were factors that aroused much of that feeling of nostalgia in me; and, as I noted a couple of months ago, 1993 is also the fortieth anniversary of my own first sale to a science-fiction magazine. Fortieth anniversaries do have a way of getting one to look toward the past.

And now another fortieth anniversary is upon me. For this is September, the month of the World Science Fiction Convention; and this year's Worldcon will be the fortieth convention I have attended.

The Worldcon is the great annual family gathering of the science-fiction clan, an assemblage of thousands and thousands of people who care passionately about this strange stuff that we choose to read and write. *Everyone* is there: writers, editors, artists, publishers, book dealers, and, of course, readers—the fans, who are actually the people who organize each year's Worldcon and do the brutal work that makes it happen. In the course of my forty years of Worldcon attendance, I've had a chance to meet and get to know virtually the entire roster of science fiction's great creative figures, from Frank R. Paul, Edmond Hamilton, and E. E. "Doc" Smith of the earliest days of our field down to the promising novices who

will evolve into the supernovae of twenty-first-century sf. I can't imagine missing a convention. Through all the ebbs and flows of my career, the thought of not going to a Worldcon has never entered my mind.

There aren't many who have attended as many as forty Worldcons. Forrest J Ackerman, that survivor from the dawn of sf fandom, is one who has, I know: Forry was at the first one in 1939, and has been at virtually every one since. Probably Fred Pohl (who was excluded from that 1939 convention for political reasons by fiat of its organizers, a notable moment in fan history) has been to more than forty, too, out of the fifty that have been held up to this year. Perhaps there are three or four others. But I must be high up on the list of perennial attendees.

This year's convention is in San Francisco, just across the bay from my home. Ironically, the last time I missed a Worldcon, it was in San Francisco also, in 1954: but I lived on the East Coast then, and as a 19-year-old college student I simply couldn't come up with the funds to take me on that vast journey of 3000 miles across the country. I often wonder what that young Bob Silverberg would say, if he could be told that forty years later he would be driving twenty minutes from his home to attend another San Francisco Worldcon—or that he would be writing about doing it in his regular AMAZING Stories column.

Images of Worldcons past come

floating up out of the memory bank as I look back over those astonishing forty years.

Your first one, of course, is always unforgettable. For me that was the Philadelphia convention of 1953, at the glorious Bellevue-Stratford hotel. I was eighteen; I had just made my first professional sale (and would be paid for it, all thirty dollars, at the convention). And now, at last, I would attend my first Worldcon! Staying in a three-room suite, no less.

A suite, you say? How did an impecunious college kid manage that? Where did I ever find the money—a suite at the Bellevue-Stratford must have cost all of twelve or fifteen dollars a night, in 1953—to manage such stately lodgings?

Through entrepreneurial zeal, of course. I teamed up with a fellow fan, a kid from Cleveland, one Harlan Ellison, with whom I agreed to split the bill. Then we offered crash space—couches, chairs, the floor, whatever—to our numerous friends in the fan community, at \$5 per night. At least twenty of them signed up. The result was a kind of convention within the convention: our three rooms were packed every night, a stellar array of 1953's great fan figures holding an intense round-the-clock party. As the organizers of the commune, Harlan and I not only got to be the ones who slept in the beds (when we slept at all, an hour or two a night) but wound up paying nothing for our suite and turning a profit of forty or fifty dollars each, besides.



1956, New York: Young Bob Silverberg flanked by Algis Budrys and fan Charles Harris



1960, Pittsburgh: Silverberg and illustrator Ed Emshwiller

It was a wondrous weekend. I stared in awe at the writers and editors I had revered all through my adolescence—Theodore Sturgeon, John W. Campbell, Willy Ley, Frederik Pohl, Lester del Rey, L. Sprague de Camp, and dozens more—moving like ordinary mortals through the throngs in the lobby. I looked with envy on the hot young writers like Robert Shekley and Frank M. Robinson, whose names were on the tables of contents of all the magazines, and earnestly prayed to join them there some day. (Which I did; and I formed lifelong friendships with them both, besides.) I mingled with fan friends I had known only through correspondence, and worked hard to live up to my postal reputation for acute wit and erudition. I blurted out my literary ambitions to editors like Harry Harrison and Larry T. Shaw, and was encouraged by what they had to say, though probably they were just being nice to the lanky, crew-cutty tyro that I was. I watched the very first Hugos being handed out, not even daring to suppose that some day I would be a winner myself. And I went home (by bus, Philadelphia to New York) in a daze of excitement and fatigue, my life forever transformed in a single weekend.

I swore never to miss a Worldcon again. But the next year's convention, I discovered, was in far-off San Francisco, the other side of the continent from me. It might just as well have been on the Moon.

By the time of the 1955 convention in Cleveland, though, I was a prosperous young writer who had

made at least a dozen sales to the sf magazines, on my own and in collaboration with the somewhat more experienced writer Randall Garrett, whom I had met in New York. (At the 1953 Worldcon, Garrett had shown up one night, drunk and disorderly, at the perpetual party in the Ellison-Silverberg suite, and I had shut the door in his face. "Do you know who that is?" Harlan had asked me, aghast. "That's *Randall Garrett*. He's a *pro*!" But I didn't care: we had enough loudmouths in the room as it was. Garrett had no recollection of the incident a couple of years later, when we met, and we hit it off beautifully as collaborators.) Now my stories were all over the magazines. I had graduated with lightning swiftness into the professional ranks. It all seemed pretty much like a dream to me as Garrett led me around the convention, introducing me to the writers who were now my colleagues.

I met Isaac Asimov at that convention, and Fritz Leiber, and James E. Gunn, and Fred Pohl, and Anthony Boucher, and the legendary Bob Tucker, and I don't know how many others of the great. It was an awesome thing to be in their presence, actually chatting with them virtually as an equal at a party where only the inner circle of writers and editors was present. The 1953 convention had been my initiation into the tribe; the 1955 one marked my debut among the pros. I was a figure of some interest to them, I could see: the field then was very small, and *any* prolific new writer was immediately conspicuous. (The total atten-

dance at that 1955 convention, fans and pros together, was all of 380 people, so everyone quickly knew everyone else. Modern Worldcons are ten to twenty times as big.)

I remember the trip home from Cleveland, too: six or seven of us, including Harlan, and Ian Macauley (who would become an editor with the New York *Times*), and Jolly Karl Olsen (who still comes to conventions, jolly as ever) and some others, crammed into what I think was Macauley's car for an all-night turnpike drive to New York. I didn't have a driver's license, then, but everyone else took turns at the wheel, including Karl, who *also* didn't have a license but didn't tell us that until he had run the car up on the center divider. We survived.

And went on to 1956, a vast Worldcon in New York. I had sold so many stories by then that my colleagues were looking at me not with curiosity, now, but with uneasiness and a bit of horror. That was the year I won my first Hugo—the award for Most Promising New Author. (I beat out two fellows who were still pretty obscure that year: Harlan Ellison, whose professional career had barely begun, and a guy named Frank Herbert, who had had two or three stories published.) It seemed a very long way from that Philadelphia convention, just three summers earlier.

I vividly remember the sweaty, exciting time just after the Hugo ceremony, as I stood there clutching my shiny trophy and accepting congratulations. Betty Farmer, Philip José Farmer's irrepressible wife, came up





1968, Oakland: Philip K. Dick, his wife Nancy, and our correspondent.

to me and gave me a hug; and then she said, "You know, Phil won the same Hugo in 1953. And he hasn't been able to sell a story since." She was just joking, of course. And he and I both managed to keep our careers afloat thereafter, as did Brian W. Aldiss, the third and final winner, a couple of years later, of the Hugo in the Most Promising New Author category.

I could fill a book, I think, with Worldcon anecdotes. (Some of them would get me sued, I suspect.) The 1957 convention was the first overseas one, in London, and I made my first trip to Europe to attend it. The hotel room cost \$2.40 per night, and seemed a little overpriced at that, but we had a wondrous time, all 268 of us from both sides of the Atlantic. (The hotel dining room staff would put out the breakfast cereals in open bowls every night, and would urge us please not to take short-cuts through the room on our way to the bar because it would get dust into the corn flakes.)

1958, and Los Angeles: I got to see California at last, the palm trees and the freeways, little imagining that I'd live there some day. Among those I met for the first time at that convention were Poul Anderson and William Rotsler, now friends of decades' duration; I met Terry Carr there too, and watched him meet the beautiful woman who would become his first wife. (The marriage didn't last long, and, sadly, neither did Terry; but he and I had some wonderful times to-

gether before his too-early death at the age of 50.)

1959, 1960, Detroit, Pittsburgh. . . It was at one of those conventions, I forget which, that I was roaming the halls of an afternoon and came upon Gordie Dickson, Poul Anderson, and Ted Cogswell sitting in a hotel room with the door open, contemplating an entire case of tequila. I was never a drinker on the heroic Dickson-Cogswell scale, but I do touch a drop now and then; they invited me in and I helped them dispose of some of it. Quite an afternoon.

And Seattle, in 1961: the con was at a little motel near the airport that year. Robert A. Heinlein was the guest of honor, and gave a party in his room for the *entire convention*, the entire roster of 300 attendees, holding court in his bathrobe, pouring drinks himself, greeting dozens of people by name, an astonishing performance. I began to understand why Heinlein was such a mesmerizing writer: his irresistible fiction was an extension of his own magnetic personality. An extraordinary man; it was a privilege to have known him, and if there had been no Worldcons, I might never have had the chance.

Heinlein was the star again in 1962 in Chicago, materializing unexpectedly as though out of hyperspace in a white dinner jacket to collect his Hugo for *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Conventions were starting to get bigger, now: there were 550 people at the Chicago con, in a two-tower hotel



1972, Los Angeles: Long hair and sandals were the look of the day.

of confusing layout. (One night Harlan Ellison and I somehow missed connections with our friends and found ourselves with no way of discovering where the party we were supposed to be attending was located. We didn't even know which building it was in. So we sat quietly by ourselves on a back staircase for an hour or two, reviewing in wonder the dizzying six-year evolution of our writing careers, until at last someone we knew came by and told us where to find the gathering we were looking for.)

There was the crazed episode in 1967, another New York Worldcon, where dozens of writers waited forever in the hotel dining room for service, and an angry Lester del Rey dumped an overdue salad on the floor while at the same moment Harlan flung a plate of popovers against the wall. And the next night I led many of the same people to a favorite restaurant of mine where we wound up in a back room next to a garbage can, and waited again for our dinners, waited so very long this time that people whose names would be recognized by you all started to go berserk, and I thought I would be lynched by my own friends. Anne

McAffrey had to quell the raging mob, finally.

I no longer regarded myself as a callow novice amidst a hand of demigods, by then. I had been around for a dozen years, and plenty of writers junior to me had entered the field—Roger Zelazny, Larry Niven, Samuel R. Delany, Thomas Disch, and more. I watched them arrive one by one, and remembered how the old-timers had watched me do the same.

Still, I was startled in 1968 when the chairman of that year's Worldcon (it was to be in Berkeley, California) phoned and asked if I would serve as Toastmaster at the Hugo Awards ceremony. The toastmastership is one of the Worldcon's most significant responsibilities, and in those years it seemed invariably to rotate exclusively among a small group of our most distinguished citizens—Isaac Asimov, Anthony Boucher, Robert Bloch. Boucher was to have been toastmaster again at that year's convention, but he had died that spring; and suddenly I found myself promoted into that little group. To me it marked a rite of passage in the Worldcon subculture. (My toastmaster stint at the 1968 convention was exhausting and exhilarating, and I loved every moment of it. In the years that followed I ran the awards ceremony on four or five other occasions, and, I hope, lived up to the standard set by my impressive predecessors.)

That 1968 convention was a bizarre event—marked by widespread drug use, the convention debut of weird 1960s clothing and rock bands, riots near the hotel, all the craziness of that strange era erupting all at once. No one who was there will ever forget that dreamlike weekend.

Nor will I forget the more prosaic convention in St. Louis the following year, but for different reasons. Again, I found myself ascending into realms of sf achievement that would have sent my adolescent self into paroxysms of disbelief. I delivered the keynote address at that convention; a couple of days later, I was handed another Hugo, for my novella "Nightwings"; and then I was told, right at the end of the weekend, that I was to be Guest of Honor at the following

year's convention in Heidelberg, Germany.

To be Worldcon Guest of Honor is, I suppose, the summit of the science-fiction writer's course of accomplishment. I was only 35 years old when my turn came, making me one of the youngest ever—along with Heinlein and Asimov, who were 34 and 35, respectively. What amazed me even more, and left me a little abashed as well, was that at the time of my elevation to the Guest of Honorship, such writers as Clifford D. Simak, Frederik Pohl, Jack Williamson, Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, and Jack Vance had never been chosen. (They all got their turns, eventually. But they should have preceded me.)

So many stories to tell, so little space for them. . . .

The 1964 convention in Oakland, where I rose to place a mock bid for a convention the following year at some posh resort in the Virgin Islands, and discovered, to my chagrin, that the attendees were taking the bid seriously and had given me a majority vote on the spot. (I withdrew in favor of London, the genuine bidder.) The 1975 convention in Australia, where I rose to address Australian fandom for the first time and found myself on the verge of telling an utterly unprintable joke about a wombat instead of offering some profound literary observations. The 1978 convention in Phoenix, where the summer heat shriveled our very souls, and Harlan—Guest of Honor that year—gambly wrote a short story while sitting inside a plastic bubble in the hotel lobby, and sold it to *Omnit* on the spot. The 1979 convention in Brighton, England, where the British publisher Victor Gollancz gave a party for the convention VIPs at the glorious eighteenth-century Royal Pavilion, and we were each formally announced by a crier as though we were coming into the presence of the Queen. The 1987 Brighton convention, too, where Brian Aldiss, winning a Hugo again after a lapse of a quarter of a century, accepted it hy amiably declaring, "You bastards, what took you so long?"

(Which brings to mind the grotesque 1983 Hugo ceremony in Baltimore, which was preceded by a

ketchupy crab luncheon where thousands of impatient fans began to hang their spoons on the table, after which everything else that could possibly go wrong did. The winners went away happy, anyway.)

Heinlein once more, presiding over a Red Cross blood drive in Kansas City in 1976: you wanted a Heinlein autograph, you had to donate a pint of your blood. Or Fred Pohl, resplendent in tuxedo, performing tirelessly and brilliantly at four or five functions a day in his capacity as master of ceremonies at the 1989 Boston Worldcon. Or the evening I spent with Isaac and Janet Asimov at the same convention—the last time, as it turned out, that I would ever see Isaac. Or the post-Hugo party at the 1990 con in Holland, where I stood around in a crowded room in the heat of an almost tropically humid evening wearing jacket and tie while accepting congratulations for my newest award until I felt myself beginning to melt, and ran off to my hotel room two blocks away to change into fresh clothing. . . .

The 1991 convention in Chicago, where the glittering black-long hair of the Hyatt Hotel offered grappa at \$350 a shot, and where I met Kim Mohan of *AMAZING Stories* for the first time. (He bought me a drink. But our first meeting happened to take place in the hotel next door, so I didn't get a chance to put a shot of that grappa on his expense account. Just as well, I suspect.)

And last year, in Orlando, where the elite of science fiction gathered twice a day in the lobby of the elegant Peabody Hotel to watch a parade of ducks. . . .

Forty years. The stories I could tell would fill a book and a half.

And now this year, in San Francisco. Another Worldcon, a new collection of wondrous memories to add to the rich store already laid by. If this is going to be your twentieth or twenty-fifth convention, well, it'll be good to see you again, old friend. And if it'll be your first Worldcon: welcome, stranger! You're in for the experience of a lifetime. ♦

# Dancing to Ganam

Ursula K. Le Guin

Illustration by  
Mark Maxwell



"Power is the great drumming," Aketa said. "The thunder. The noise of the waterfall that makes the electricity. It fills you till there's no room for anything else."

Ket poured a few drops of water onto the ground, murmuring, "Drink, traveler." She sprinkled pollen meal over the ground, murmuring, "Eat, traveler." She looked up at Iyananam, the mountain of power. "Maybe he only listened to the thunder, and couldn't hear anything else," she said. "Do you think he knew what he was doing?"

"He knew what he was doing," Aketa said.

\* \* \*

Since the successful though problematic transience of the *Sboby* to and from a nasty little planet called M-60-440-nolo, a whole wing of Ve Port had been given over to churten technology. The originators of churten theory swarmed in from Anarres and the engineers of transience from Urras (all, of course, on ships that went only nearly as fast as light), and set up experiments and investigations designed to find out what, in fact, happened when a ship and its crew went from one place in the universe to another without taking any time at all to do so. "You cannot say 'went,' you cannot say 'happened,'" they chided. "It is here not there in one moment and in that same moment it is there not here. The non-interval is called, in our language, churten."

Interlocking with these circles of Cetian temporalists were circles of Hainish psychologists, investigating and arguing about what, in fact, happened when intelligent life forms experienced the churten. "You cannot say 'in fact,' you cannot say 'experienced,'" they chided. "The reality point of 'arrival' for a churten crew is obtained by mutual perception-comparison and adjustment, so that for thinking beings construction of event is essential to effective transience," and so on, and on, for the Hainish have been talking for a million years and have never got tired of it. But they are also fond of listening, and they listened to what the crew of the *Sboby* had to tell them. And when Commander Dalzul arrived, they listened to him.

"You have to send one man alone," he said. "The problem is interference. There were ten people on the *Sboby*. Send one man. Send me."

\* \* \*

"You ought to go with Shan," Betton said.

His mother shook her head.

"It's dumb not to go!"

"If they don't want you, they don't get me."

The boy knew better than to hug her, or say anything much. But he did something he seldom did: he made a joke. "You'd be back in no time," he said.

"Oh, get along," Tai said.

\* \* \*

Shan knew that the Hainish did not wear uniforms and did not use status-indicators such as "Commander." But he put on his black and silver uniform of the Terran Ekumen to meet Commander Dalzul.

Born in the barracks of Alberta, Dalzul took a degree in temporal physics at the University of A-Io on Urras and trained with the Stables on Hain before returning to his native planet as an officer of the Ekumen of the Worlds. He was asked to observe a troublesome minor religious

movement, which by the time he got there at NAFAL speed had escalated into the horrors of the Unist Revolution. Dalzul got the situation under control within months, by a combination of acumen and tactics that won him the respect of those he worked for, and the worship of those he had worked against—for the Unist Fathers decided he was God. The worldwide slaughter of the unbelievers devolved into a worldwide novena of adoration of the New Manifestation, before devolving further into schisms and sects intent mainly on bashing one another. Dalzul had defused the worst resurgence of theocratic violence since the Time of Pollution. He had acted with grace, with wit, with patience, reliability, resilience, trickiness, and good humor, with all the means the Ekumen most honored.

As he could not work on Terra, being prey to deification, he was given obscure but significant tasks on obscure but significant planets; one of them was Orint, the only world from which the Ekumen had yet withdrawn. They did so on Dalzul's advice, shortly before the Orintians destroyed sentient life on their world by the use of pathogens in war. Dalzul had foretold the event with terrible and compassionate accuracy. He had set up the secret, last-minute rescue of a few thousand children whose parents were willing to let them go; Dalzul's Children, these last of the Orintians were called.

Shan knew that heroes were phenomena of primitive cultures; but Terra's culture was primitive, and Dalzul was his hero.

Tai read the message from Ve Port with disbelief. "What kind of crew is that?" she said. "Who asks parents to leave their kid?"

Then she looked up at Shan, and saw his face.

"It's Dalzul," he said. "He wants us. In his crew."

"Go," Tai said.

He argued, of course, but Tai was on the hero's side. He went. And for the reception at which he was to meet Dalzul, he wore the black uniform with the silver thread down the sleeves and the one silver circle over the heart.

The Commander wore the same uniform. When he saw him, Shan's heart leaped and thudded. Inevitably, Dalzul was shorter than Shan had imagined him: he was not three meters tall. But otherwise he was as he should be, erect and lithe, the long, light hair going grey pulled back from a magnificent, vivid face, the eyes as clear as water. Shan had not realized how white-skinned he was, but the deformity or atavism was minor and could even be seen as having its own beauty. Dalzul's voice was warm and quiet; he laughed as he talked to a group of excited Anarrests. He saw Shan, turned, came straight to him. "At last! You're Shan, I'm Dalzul, we're shipmates. I am truly sorry your partner couldn't be one of us. But her replacements are old friends of yours, I think—Forest and Riel."

Shan was delighted to see the two familiar faces. Forest's an obsidian knife with watchful eyes, Riel's round and shining as a copper sun. He had been in training on Ollut with them. They greeted him with equal pleasure. "This is wonderful," he said, and then, "So we're all Terrans?"—a stupid question, since the fact was obvious; but the Ekumen generally favored mixing cultures in a crew.

"Come on out of this," Dalzul said, "and I'll explain." He signalled a mezklete, which trotted over, proudly pushing a little cart laden with drinks and food. They filled trays, thanked the mezklete, and found themselves a deep windowseat well away from the noisy throng. There they sat and ate and drank and talked and listened. Dalzul did not try to hide his passionate conviction that he was on the right track to solve the "churten problem."

"I've gone out twice alone," he said. He lowered his voice slightly as he spoke, and Shan began naively, "With-out—?" and stopped.

Dalzul grinned. "No, no. With the permission of the Churten Research Group. But not really with their blessing. That's why I tend to whisper and look over my shoulder. There are still some CRG people here who make me feel as if I'd stolen their ship—scoffed at their theories—violated their shifgrethor—peed on their shoes— Even after the ship and I roundtripped with no churten problems, no perceptual dissonances at all."

"Where?" Forest asked, blade-sharp face intent.

"First trip, inside this system, from Ve to Hain and back. A bus trip. Everything known, expectable. It was absolutely without incident—as expected. I'm here: I'm there. I leave the ship to check in with the Stables, get back in the ship, and I'm here. Hey presto! It is magic, you know. And yet it seems so natural. Where one is, one is. Did you feel that, Shan?"

The clear eyes were amazing in their intensity. It was like being looked at by lightning. Shan wanted to be able to agree, but had to stammer, "I—we, you know, we had some trouble deciding where we were."

"I think that that's unnecessary, that confusion. Transilience is a non-experience. I think that normally, *nothing happens*. Literally nothing. Extraneous events got mixed into it in the Shoby experiment—your interval was queered. This time, I think we can have a non-experience." He looked at Forest and Riel and laughed. "You'll not-see what I don't mean," he said. "Anyhow, after the bus trip, I hung about annoying them persistently until the CRG agreed to let me do a solo exploratory."

The mezklete bustled up to them, pushing its little cart with its furry paws. Mezklates loved parties, loved to give food, loved to serve drinks and watch their humans get weird. It stayed about hopefully for a while to see if they would get weird, then bustled back to the Anarrest theorists, who were always weird.

"An exploratory—a first contact?"

Dalzul nodded. His strength and unconscious dignity were daunting, and yet his delight, his simple glee, in what he had done was irresistible. Shan had met brilliant people and wise people, but never one whose energy shone so bright, so clear, so vulnerable.

"We chose a distant one. G-14-214-yomo; it was Tadkla on the maps of the Expansion; the people I met there call it Ganam. A preliminary Ekumen mission is actually on its way there at NAFAL speed. Left Ollul eight years ago, and will get there thirteen years from herenow. Of course there was no way to communicate with them while they're in transit, to tell them I was going to be there ahead of them. The CRG thought it a good idea that somebody

would be dropping in after thirteen years. In case I didn't report back, maybe they could find out what happened. But it looks now as if the mission will arrive to find Ganam already a member of the Ekumen!" He looked at them all, alight with passion and intention. "You know, churten is going to change everything. When transilience replaces space travel—all travel—when there is no distance between worlds—when we control interval—I keep trying to imagine, to understand what it will mean, to the Ekumen, to us. We'll be able to make the household of humankind truly one house, one place. But then it goes still deeper! In transilience what we do is to rejoin, restore the primal moment, the beat that is the rhythm. . . . To rejoin unity. To escape time. To use eternity! You've been there, Shan—you felt what I'm trying to say?"

"I don't know," Shan said. "Yes—"

"Do you want to see the tape of my trip?" Dalzul asked abruptly, his eyes shining with a flicker of mischief. "I brought a handview."

"Yes!" Forest and Riel said, and they crowded in around him in the windowseat like a bunch of conspirators. The mezklete tried in vain to see what they were doing, but was too short, even when it got up on its cart.

While he programmed the little viewcr, Dalzul told them briefly about Ganam. One of the outermost "seedlings" of the Hainish Expansion, the world had been lost from the human community for five hundred millennia; nothing was known about it except that it might have a population descended from human ancestors. If it did, the Ekumenical ship on its way to it would in the normal way have observed from orbit for a long time before sending down a few observers, to hide, or to pass if possible, or to reveal their mission if necessary, while gathering information, learning languages and customs, and so on—a process usually of many years. All this had been shortcircuited by the unpredictability of the new technology. Dalzul's small ship had come out of churten not in the stratosphere as intended, but in the atmosphere, about a hundred meters above the ground.

"I didn't have the chance to make an unobtrusive entrance on the scene," he said. The audiovisual record his ship's instruments had made came up on the little screen as he spoke. They saw the grey plains of Ve Port dropping away as the ship left the planet. "Now," Dalzul said, and in one instant they saw the stars blaze in black space and the yellow walls and orange roofs of a city, the blaze of sunlight on a canal.

"You see?" Dalzul murmured. "Nothing happens."

The city tilted and settled, sunny streets and squares full of people, all of them looking up and pointing, unmistakably shouting, "Look! Look!"

"Decided I might as well accept the situation," Dalzul said. Trees and grass rose up around the ship as he brought it on down. People were already hurrying out of the city, human people: terracotta colored, rather massively built, with broad faces, bare-armed, barefoot, wearing kilts and gilets in splendid colors, men with great gold earrings, headdresses of basketry, gold wire, feather plumes.

"The Ganan," Dalzul said. "The people of Ganam. . . . Grand, aren't they? And they don't waste time. They were

there within half an hour—there, that's Ket, see her, that stunning woman?—Since the ship was obviously fairly alarming, I decided that the first point to make was my defensiveness."

They saw what he meant, as the ship's camera recorded his exit. He walked slowly out on the grass and stood still, facing the gathering crowd. He was naked. Unarmed, unclothed, alone, he stood there, the fierce sun bright on his white skin and silvery hair, his hands held wide and open in the gesture of offering.

The pause was very long. Talk and exclamation among the Gaman died out as people came near the front of the crowd. Dalzul, in the center of the camera's field, stood easily, motionless. Then—Shan drew breath sharply as he watched—a woman came forward towards him. She was tall and strongly built, with round arms, black eyes above high cheekbones. Her hair was braided with gold into a coronet on her head. She stood before Dalzul and spoke, her voice clear and full. The words sounded like poetry, like ritual questions, Shan thought. Dalzul responded by bringing his hands toward his heart, then opening them again wide, palm up.

The woman gazed at him awhile, then spoke one resonant word. Slowly, with a grave formality, she slipped the dark red gilet from her breasts and shoulders, untied her kilt and dropped it aside with a splendid, conscious gesture, and stood naked before the naked man.

She reached out her hand. Dalzul took it.

They walked away from the ship, towards the city. The crowd closed in behind them and followed them, still quiet, without haste or confusion, as if performing actions they had performed before.

A few people, mostly adolescents, stayed behind, looking at the ship, daring to come closer, curious, cautious, but not frightened.

Dalzul stopped the tape.

"You see," he said to Shan, "the difference?"

Shan, awed, did not speak.

"What the *Sboby*'s crew discovered," Dalzul said to the three of them, "is that individual experiences of transience can be made coherent only by a concerted effort. An effort to synchronize—to entrain. When they realized that, they were able to pull out of an increasingly dangerously fragmented perception of where they were and what was happening. Right, Shan?"

"They call it the chaos experience now," Shan said, subdued by the memory of it, and by the difference of Dalzul's experience.

"The temporalists and psychologists have sweated a lot of theory out of the *Sboby* trip," Dalzul said. "My reading of it is pitifully simple: that a great deal of the perceptual dissonance, the anguish and incoherence, was an effect of the disparity of the *Sboby* crew. No matter how well you had crew-bonded, Shan, you were ten people from four worlds—four different cultures—two very old women, and three young children! If the answer to coherent transience is entrainment, functioning in rhythm, then we've got to make entrainment easy. That you achieved it at all was miraculous. The simplest way to achieve it, of course, is to bypass it: to go alone."

"Then how do you get a cross-check on the experience?" Forest said.

"You just saw it: the ship's record of the landing."

"But our instruments on the *Sboby* went out, or were totally erratic," Shan said. "The readings are as incoherent as our perceptions were."

"Exactly! You and the instruments were all in one entrainment field, fouling each other up. But when just two or three of you went down onto the planet's surface, things were better: the lander functioned perfectly, and its tapes of the surface are clear. Although very ugly."

Shan laughed. "Ugly, yes. A sort of shit-planet. But, Commander, even on the tapes it never is clear who actually went out onto the surface. And that was one of the most chaotic parts of the whole experience. I went down with Gveter and Betton. The surface under the ship was unstable, so I called them back to the lander and we went back up to the ship. That all seems coherent. But Gveter's perception was that he went down with Betton and Tai, not me, heard Tai call him from the ship, and came back with Betton and me. As for Betton, he went down with Tai and me. He saw his mother walk away from the lander, ignore the order to return, and be left on the surface. Gveter saw that too. They came back without her and found her waiting for them on the bridge. Tai herself has no memory of going down in the lander. Those four stories are all our evidence. They seem to be equally true, equally untrue. And the tapes don't help—don't show who was in the suits. They all look alike in that shit soup on the surface."

"That's it—exactly—" Dalzul said, leaning forward, his face alight. "That murk, that shit, that chaos you saw, which the cameras in your field saw—Think of the difference between that and the tapes we just watched! Sunlight, vivid faces, bright colors, everything brilliant, clear—Because there was no interference, Shan. The Cetians say that in the churten field there is nothing but the deep rhythms, the vibration of the ultimate wave-particles. Transience is a function of the rhythm that makes being. According to Cetian spiritual physics, it's access to that rhythm which allows the individual to participate in eternity and ubiquity. My extrapolation from that is that individuals in transience have to be in nearly perfect synchrony to arrive at the same place with a harmonious—that is, an accurate—perception of it. My intuition, as far as we've tested it, has been confirmed: one person can churten sanely. Until we learn what we're doing, ten persons will inevitably experience chaos, or worse."

"And four persons?" Forest inquired, drily.

"Are the control," said Dalzul. "Frankly, I'd rather have started out by going on more solos, or with one companion at most. But our friends from Anarres, as you know, are very distrustful of what they call egoizing. To them, morality isn't accessible to individuals—only to groups. Also, they say, maybe something else went wrong on the *Sboby* experiment, maybe a group can churten just as well as one person, how do we know till we try? So I compromised. I said, send me with two or three highly compatible and highly motivated companions. Send us back to Gaman and let's see what we see!"

"Motivated" is inadequate," Shan said. "I am committed. I belong to this crew."

Riel was nodding; Forest, wary and saturnine, said only, "Are we going to practice entrainment, Commander?"

"As long as you like," Dalzul said. "But there are things more important than practice. Do you sing, Forest, or play an instrument?"

"I can sing," Forest said, and Riel and Shan nodded as Dalzul looked at them.

"You know this," he said, and began softly to sing an old song, a song everybody from the barracks and camps of Terra knew, "Going to the Western Sea." Riel joined in, then Shan, then Forest in an unexpectedly deep, resonant voice. A few people near them turned to hear the harmonies strike through the gabble of speaking voices. The mezklete came hurrying over, abandoning its cart, its eyes large and bright. They ended the song, smiling, on a long soft chord.

"That is entrainment," Dalzul said. "All we need to get to Ganam is music. All there is, in the end, is music."

Smiling, Forest and then Riel raised their glasses.

"To music!" said Shan, feeling drunk and wildly happy.

"To the crew of the *Galba*," said Dalzul, and they drank.

\* \* \*

The minimum crew-bonding period of isyeye was of course observed, and during it they had plenty of time to discuss the churten problem, both with Dalzul and among themselves. They watched the ship's tapes and reread Dalzul's records of his brief stay on Ganam till they had them memorized, and then argued about the wisdom of doing so. "We're simply accepting everything he saw and said as objective fact," Forest pointed out. "What sort of control can we provide?"

"His report and the ship's tapes agree completely," Shan said.

"Because, if his theory is correct, he and the instruments were entrained. The reality of the ship and the instruments may be perceivable to us only as perceived by the person, the intelligent being, in transience. If the Cetians are sure of one thing about churten, it's that when intelligence is involved in the process they don't understand it any more. Send out a robot ship, no problem. Send out amochas and crickets, no problem. Send out high-intelligence beings and all the bets are off. Your ship was part of your reality—your ten different realities. Its instruments obediently recorded the dissonances, or were affected by them to the point of malfunction and nonfunction. Only when you all worked together to construct a joint, coherent reality, could the ship begin to respond to it and record it. Right?"

"Yes. But it's very difficult," Shan said, "to live without the notion that there is, somewhere, if one could just find it, a fact."

"Only fiction," said Forest, unrelenting. "Fact is one of our finest fictions."

"But music comes first," Shan said. "And dancing is people being music. I think what Dalzul sees is that we can . . . we can dance to Ganam."

"I like that," said Riel. "And look: on the fiction theory,

we should be careful not to 'believe' Dalzul's records, or his ship's tapes. They're fictions. But, unless we accept the assumption, based only on the *Sboby* experiment, that the churten experience necessarily skews perception or judgment of perception, we have no reason to *disbelieve* them. He's a seasoned observer and a superb gestalter."

"There are elements of a rather familiar kind of fiction in his report," Forest said. "The princess who has apparently been waiting for him, expecting him, and leads him naked to her palace—where after due ceremonies and amenities she has sex with him—and very good sex too—I'm not saying I disbelieve it. I don't. It looks and rings true. But it would be interesting to know how the princess perceived these events."

"We can't know that till we get there and talk to her," said Riel. "What are we waiting for, anyhow?"

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The *Galba* was a Hainish in-system glass ship, newly fitted with churten controls. It was a pretty little bubble, not much bigger than the *Sboby's* lander. Entering it, Shan had a few rather bad moments. The chaos, the senseless and centerless experience of churten, returned vividly to him: must he go through that again? Could he? Very sharp and aching was the thought of Tai, Tai who should be here now as she had been there then, Tai whom he had come to love aboard the *Sboby*, and Betton, the clear-hearted child—he needed them, they should be here.

Forest and Riel slipped through the hatch, and after them came Dalzul, the concentration of his energy almost visible around him as an aura or halo, a brightness of being. No wonder the Unists thought he was God, Shan thought, and thought also of the ceremonial, almost reverent welcome shown Dalzul by the Ganam. Dalzul was charged, full of mana, a power to which others responded, by which they were entrained. Shan's anxiety slipped from him. He knew that with Dalzul there would be no chaos.

"They thought we'd be able to control a bubble easier than the ship I had. I'll try not to bring her out right over the roofs this time. No wonder they thought I was a god, materializing in full view like that!" Shan had got used to the way Dalzul seemed to echo his thoughts, and Riel's and Forest's, and had come to expect it; they were in synchrony, it was their strength.

They took their places, Dalzul at the churten console, Riel plugged into the AI, Shan at the flight controls, and Forest as gestalt and Support. Dalzul looked round and nodded, and Shan took them out a few hundred kilometers from Ve Port. The curve of the planet fell away and the stars shone under his feet, around, above.

Dalzul began to sing, not a melody but a held note, a full, deep A. Riel joined in, an octave above, then Forest on the F between, and Shan found himself pouring out a steady middle C as if he were a church organ. Riel shifted to the C above, Dalzul and Forest sang the triad, and as the chord changed Shan did not know who sang which note, hearing and being only the sphere of the stars and the sweet frequencies swelling and fading in one long-held unison as Dalzul touched the console and the yellow sun was high in the blue sky above the city.

Shan had not stopped flying. Red and orange roofs, dusty plazas tilted under the ship. "How about over there, Shan," Dalzul said, pointing to a green strip by a canal, and Shan brought the *Galba* effortlessly down in a long glide and touched it onto grass, soft as a soap bubble.

He looked round at the others, and out through the walls.

"Blue sky, green grass, near noon, natives approaching," said Dalzul. "Right?"

"Right," said Riel, and Shan laughed. No conflict of sensations, no chaos of perceptions, no terror of uncertainty, this time. "We churtened," he said. "We did it. We danced it!"

The field-workers down by the canal got into a group and watched, evidently afraid to approach, but very soon people could be seen on the dusty road leading out from the city. "The welcoming committee, I trust," said Dalzul.

The four of them waited beside the bubble-ship. The tension of the moment only heightened the extraordinary vividness of emotion and sensation. Shan felt that he knew the beautiful, harsh outlines of the two volcanoes that hounded the city's valley, knew them and would never forget them, knew the smell of the air and the fall of the light and the blackness of shadow under leaves; this is herenow, he said to himself with joyous certainty, I am herenow and there is no distance, no separation.

Tension without fear. Plumed and crested men, broad-chested and strong-armed, walked towards them steadily, their faces impassive, and stopped facing them. One elderly man nodded his head slightly and said, "Sem Dazu." Dalzul made the gesture from heart to open embrace, saying, "Viaka!" The other men said, "Dazu, Sem Dazu," and some of them imitated Dalzul's gesture.

"Viaka," Dalzul said. "Beya"—friend—and he introduced his companions to them, repeating their names and the word friend.

"Foyes," said old Viaka. "Shan, Yeh." He knew he hadn't come very close to "Riel," and frowned slightly. "Friends. Be welcome. Come, come in Ganam." During his brief first stay, Dalzul had not been able to record much of the language for the Hainish linguists to work on; from his meager tapes they and their clever analoguers had produced a little manual of vocabulary and grammar, full of [?]'s, which Shan had dutifully studied. He remembered beya, and kiyugi—be welcome [?] be at home [?]. Riel, a hilfer/linguist, would have liked longer to study the manual. "Better to learn the language from the speakers," Dalzul had said.

As they walked the dusty road to Ganam city, the vividness of impression began to overload on Shan, becoming a blur and glory of heat and radiance, red and yellow clay walls, pottery-red bare breasts and shoulders, purple and red and orange and umber striped and embroidered cloaks and vests and kilts, the gleam of gold and nod of feathers, the smells of oil and incense and dust and smoke and food and sweat, the sounds of many voices, slap of sandals and sluff of bare feet on stone and earth, bells, gongs, the difference of light, the touch and smell and beat of a world where nothing was known and everything was as it was, as it should be, this little city of stone and

mud and splendid carvings, fiery in the light of its gold sun, crude, magnificent, and human. It was stranger than anything Shan had known and it was as if he had been away and come home again. Tears blurred his eyes. "We are all one, he thought. There is no distance, no time between us; all we need do is step across, and we are here, together. He walked beside Dalzul and heard the people greet him, grave and quiet: Sem Dazu, they said, Sem Dazu, kiyugi. You have come home.

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The first days were all overload. There were moments when Shan thought that he had stopped thinking—was merely experiencing, receiving, not processing. "Process later," Dalzul said with a laugh, when Shan told him. "How often does one get to be a child?" It was indeed like being a child, having no control over events and no responsibility for them. Expectable or incredible, they happened, and he was part of the happening and watched it happening at the same time. They were going to make Dalzul their king. It was ridiculous and it was perfectly natural. Your king dies without an heir; a silver man drops out of your sky and your princess says, "This is the man"; the silver man vanishes and returns with three strange companions who can work various miracles; you make him king. What else can you do with him?

Riel and Forest were of course reluctant, dubious about so deep an involvement with a native culture, but had no alternative to offer Dalzul. Since the kingship was evidently more honorary than authoritative, they admitted that he had probably better go along with what the Gaman wanted. Trying to keep some perspective on Dalzul's situation, they had separated themselves early on, living in a house near the market, where they could be with common people and enjoy a freedom of movement Dalzul did not have. The trouble with being king-to-be, he told Shan, was that he was expected to hang around the palace all day observing taboos.

Shan stayed with Dalzul. Viaka gave him one of the many wings of the rambling clay palace to himself. He shared it with a relative of Viaka's wife called Abud, who helped him keep house. Nothing was expected of him, either by Dalzul or by his native hosts; his time was free. The CRG had asked them to spend thirty days in Ganam. The days flowed by like shining water. He tried to keep his journal for the Ekumcn, but found he hated to break the continuity of experience by talking about it, analyzing it. The whole point was that nothing happened, he thought, smiling.

The only experience that stood out as in some way different was a day he spent with old Viaka's niece [?] and her husband [?]; he had tried to get the kinship system straight, but the question marks remained, and for some reason this young couple seemed not to use their names. They took him on a long and beautiful walk to a waterfall up on the slope of the larger volcano, Iyananam. He understood that it was a sacred place they wanted him to see. He was very much surprised to find that the sacred waterfall was employed to power a sacred dynamo. The Gaman, as far as his companions could explain and he could understand, had a quite adequate grasp of the prin-



ciples of hydroelectricity, though they were woefully short of conductors, and had no particular practical use for the power they generated. Their discussion seemed to be about the nature of electricity rather than the application of it, but he could follow very little of it. He tried to ask if there was any place they used electricity, but all he could say was, "Somewhere come out?" At such moments he did not find it so agreeable to feel like a child, or a halfwit. Yes, the young woman said, it comes out at the ishkamen when the basemmiak vada. Shan nodded and made notes. Like all Gaman, his companions enjoyed watching him talk into his noter and seeing the tiny symbols appear on the tiny screen, an amiable magic.

They took him onto a terrace built out from the little dynamo building, which was built of dressed stone laid in marvelously intricate courses. They tried to explain something, pointing downstream. He saw something shining in the quick glitter of the water, but could not make out what it was. Heda, tahoo, they said, a word he knew well from Dalzul, though he had not himself run into anything heda till now. As they went on, he caught the name "Dazu" in their conversation with each other, but again could not follow. They passed a little earth shrine, where in the informal worship of the Gaman each of them laid a leaf from a nearby tree, and then set off down the mountain-side in the long light of late afternoon.

As they rounded a turn of the steep trail, he could see in the hazy golden distance down the great valley two other settlements, towns or cities. He was surprised to see them, and then surprised by his surprise. He realized that he had been so absorbed in being in Gaman that he had forgotten it was not the only place in the world. Pointing, he asked his companions, "Belong Gaman?" After some discussion, probably of what on earth he meant, they said no, only Gaman belonged to the Gaman; those cities were other cities.

Was Dalzul, then, right in thinking the world was called Gaman, or did that name mean just the city and its lands? "Tegud ao? What you call?" he asked, patting the ground, sweeping his arms around the circle of valley, the mountain at their backs, the other mountain facing them. "Nam tegudyeh," said Viaka's niece [?], tentatively, but her husband [?] disagreed, and they discussed it impenetrably for a mile or more. Shan gave up, put away his noter, and enjoyed the walk in the cool of the evening down towards the golden walls of Gaman.

\* \* \*

The next day, or maybe it was the day after, Dalzul came by while he was pruning the fruit tree in the walled courtyard of his bit of the palace. The pruning knife was a thin, slightly curved steel blade with a gracefully carved, well-worn wooden handle; it was sharp as a razor. "This is a lovely tool," he said to Dalzul. "My grandmother taught me to prune. It's not an art I've been able to practice much since I joined the Ekumen. They're good orcharders here. I was out talking with some of them yesterday." Had it been yesterday? Not that it mattered. Time is not duration but intensity, time is the beat and the interval, Shan had been thinking as he studied the tree, learning the inner rhythm of its growth, the patterned intervals of

its branches. The years are flowers, the worlds are fruit. . . "Pruning makes me poetical," he said, and then, looking at Dalzul, said, "Is something wrong?" It was like a skipped pulse, a wrong note, a step mistaken in the dance.

"I don't know," Dalzul said. "Let's sit down a minute." They went to the shade under the balcony and settled down crosslegged onto the flagstones. "Probably," Dalzul said, "I've relied too far on my intuitive understanding of these people—followed my nose, instead of holding back, learning the language word by word, going by the book. . . I don't know. But something is amiss."

Shan watched the strong, vivid face as Dalzul spoke. The fierce sunlight had tanned his white skin to a more human color. He wore his own shirt and trousers, but had let his grey hair fall loose as Gaman men did, wearing a narrow headband interwoven with gold, which gave him a regal and barbaric look.

"These are a barbaric people," he said. "More violent, more primitive perhaps, than I wanted to admit. This kingship they're determined to invest me with—I'm afraid I have to see it as something more than an honor or a sacred gesture. It is political, after all. At least, it would seem that by being chosen to be king, I've made a rival. An enemy."

"Who?"

"Aketa."

"I don't know him. He's not in the palace here?"

"No. He's not one of Viaka's people. He seems to have been away when I first came. As I understand Viaka, this man considers himself the heir to the throne and the legitimate mate of the princess."

"Princess Ket?" Shan had never yet spoken to the princess, who kept herself aloof, staying always in her part of the palace, though she allowed Dalzul to visit her there. "What does she say about this Aketa? Isn't she on your side? She chose you, after all."

"She says I am to be king. That hasn't changed. But she has. She's left the palace. In fact she's gone to live, as well as I can tell, in this Aketa's household! My God, Shan, is there any world in this universe where men can understand women?"

"Gethen," Shan said.

Dalzul laughed, but his face remained intense, pondering. "You have a partner," he said after a while. "Maybe that's the answer. I never came to a place with a woman where I knew, really knew, what she wanted, who she was. If you stick it out, do you finally get there?"

Shan was touched at the older man, the brilliant man, asking him such questions. "I don't know," he said. "Tai and I—we know each other in a way that— But it's not easy—I don't know. . . . But about the princess—Riel and Forest have been talking with people, learning the language. As women, maybe they'd have some insights?"

"Women yes and no," Dalzul said. "It's why I chose them, Shan. With two real women, the psychological dynamics might have been too complicated."

Shan said nothing, feeling again that something was missing or he was missing something, misunderstanding. He wondered if Dalzul knew that most of Shan's sexuality had been with men until he met Tai.

"Consider," Dalzul said, "for instance, if the princess thought she should be jealous of one or both of them, thought they were my sexual partners. That could be a snake's nest! As it is, they're no threat. Of course, seeking consonance, I'd have preferred all men. But the Elders on Hain are mostly old women, and I knew I had to suit them. So I asked you and your partner, a married couple. When your partner couldn't come, these two seemed the best solution. And they've performed admirably. But I don't think they're equipped to tell me what's going on in the mind, or the hormones, of a very fully sexed woman such as the princess!"

The beat skipped again. Shan rubbed one hand against the rough stone of the terrace, puzzled at his own sense of confusion. Trying to return to the original subject, he asked, "If it is a political kingship, not a sacred one, can you possibly—just withdraw your candidacy, as it were?"

"Oh, it's sacred. The only way I could withdraw is to run away. Churten hack to Ve Port."

"We could fly the *Galba* to another part of the planet," Shan suggested. "Observe somewhere else."

"From what Viaka tells me, leaving's not really an option. Ket's defection has apparently caused a schism, and if Aketa gains power his supporters will wreak vengeance on Viaka and all his people. Blood sacrifice for offense to the true and sacred king's person. . . . Religion and politics! How could I of all men be so blind? I let my longings persuade me that we'd found a rather primitive idyll. But what we're in the middle of here is a factional and sexual competition among intelligent barbarians who keep their pruning hooks and their swords extremely sharp." Dalzul smiled suddenly, and his light eyes flashed. "They are wonderful, these people. They are everything we lost with our literacy, our industry, our science. Directly sensual—utterly passionate—primally real. I love them. If they want to make me their king, then by God I'll put a basket of feathers on my head and be their king! But before that, I've got to figure out how to handle Aketa and his crew. And the only key to Aketa seems to be our moody Princess Ket. Whatever you can find out, tell me, Shan. I need your advice and your help."

"You have it, sir," Shan said, touched again. After Dalzul had left, he decided that what he should do was what Dalzul's unexpected male-heterosexual defensiveness prevented him from doing: go ask advice and help of Forest and Riel.

He set off for their house. As he made his way through the marvelously noisy and aromatic market, he asked himself when he had seen them last, and realized it had been several days. What had he been doing? He had been in the orchards. He had been up on the mountain, on Iyananam, where there was a dynamo . . . where he had seen other cities. . . . The pruning hook was steel. How did the Gaman make their steel? Did they have a foundry? Did they get it in trade? His mind was sluggishly, laboriously turning over these matters as he came into the courtyard, where Forest sat on a cushion on the terrace, reading a book.

"Well," she said. "A visitor from another planet?"

It had been quite a long time since he had been here—eight, ten days?

"Where've you been?" he asked, confused.

"Right here, Riel!" Forest called up to the balcony. Several heads looked over the carved railing, and the one with curly hair said, "Shan! I'll be right down!"

Riel arrived with a pot of tipu seeds, the ubiquitous munchy of Ganam. The three of them sat around on the terrace, half in the sun and half out of it, and cracked seeds; typical anthropoids, Riel remarked. She greeted Shan with real warmth, and yet she and Forest were unmistakably cautious; they watched him, they asked nothing, they waited to see . . . what? How long had it been, then, since he had seen them? He felt a sudden tremor of unease, a missed beat so profound that he put his hands flat on the warm sandstone, bracing himself. Was it an earthquake? Built between two sleepy volcanoes, the city shuddered a little now and then, bits of clay fell off the walls, little orange tiles off the roofs. . . . Forest and Riel watched him. Nothing was shaking, nothing was falling.

"Dalzul has run into some kind of problem in the palace," he said.

"Has he," said Forest in a perfectly neutral tone.

"A native claimant to the throne, a pretender or heir, has turned up. The princess is staying with him now. But she still tells Dalzul that he's to be king. If this pretender gets power, apparently he threatens reprisals against all Viaka's people, anybody who backed Dalzul. It's just the kind of sticky situation Dalzul was hoping to avoid."

"And is matchless at resolving," said Forest.

"I think he feels pretty much at an impasse. He doesn't understand what role the princess is playing. I think that troubles him most. I thought you might have some idea why, after more or less hurling herself into his arms, she's gone off to stay with his rival."

"It's Ket you're talking about," Riel said, cautious.

"Yes. He calls her the princess. That's not what she is?"

"I don't know what Dalzul means by the word. It has a lot of connotations. If the denotation is 'a king's daughter,' then it doesn't fit. There is no king."

"Not at present—"

"Not ever," Forest said.

Shan suppressed a flash of anger. He was getting tired of being the halfwit child, and Forest could be abrasively gnomish. "Look," he said, "I—I've been sort of out of it. Bear with me. I thought their king was dead. And given Dalzul's apparently miraculous descent from heaven during the search for a new king, they saw him as divinely appointed, 'the one who will hold the scepter.' Is that all wrong?"

"Divinely appointed seems to be right," Riel said.

"These are certainly sacred matters." She hesitated and looked at Forest. They worked as a team, Shan thought, but not, at the moment, a team that included him. What had become of the wonderful oneness?

"Who is this rival, this claimant?" Forest asked him.

"A man named Aketa."

"Aketa!"

"You know him?"

Again the glance between the two; then Forest turned to face him and looked directly into his eyes. "Shan," she said, "we are seriously out of sync. I wonder if we're hav-

ing the churten problem. The chaos experience you had on the *Shoby*."

"Here, now? When we've been here for days, weeks—" "Where's here?" Forest asked, serious and intent.

Shan slapped his hand on the flagstone. "Here! Now! In this courtyard of your house in Ganam! This is nothing like the chaos experience. We're sharing this—it's coherent, it's consonant, we're here together! Eating tipu seeds!"

"I think so too," Forest said, so gently that Shan realized she was trying to calm him, reassure him. "But we may be . . . reading the experience quite differently."

"People always do, everywhere," he said rather despectively.

She had moved so that he could see more clearly the book she had been reading when he came. It was an ordinary bound book, but they had brought no books with them on the *Galba*, a thick book on some kind of heavy brownish paper, hand-lettered, a Terran antique book from New Cairo Library, it was not a book but a pillow, a brick, a basket, not a book, it was a book. In a strange writing. In a strange language. A book with covers of carved wood, hinged with gold.

"What is that?" he asked almost inaudibly.

"The sacred history of the Cities Under Iyananam, we think," Forest said.

"A book," Riel said.

"They're illiterate," Shan said.

"Some of them are," said Forest.

"Quite a lot of them are, actually," said Riel. "But some of the merchants and the priests can read. Aketa gave us this. We've been studying with him. He's a marvelous teacher."

"He's a kind of scholar priest, we think," said Forest.

"There are these positions, we're calling them priesthoods because they're basically sacred, but they're really more like jobs, or vocations, callings. Very important to the Ganam, to the whole structure of society, we think. They have to be filled, things go out of whack if they aren't. And if you have the vocation, the talent, you go out of whack if you don't do it, too. A lot of them are kind of occasional, like a person that officiates at an annual festival, but some of them seem to be really demanding, and very prestigious. Most of them are for men. Our feeling is that probably the way a man gets prestige is to fill one of the priesthoods."

"But men run the whole city," Shan protested.

"I don't know," Forest said, still with the uncharacteristic gentleness that told Shan he was not in full control. "We'd describe it as a non-gender-dominant society. Not much division of labor on sexual lines. All kinds of marriages—polyandry may be the most common, two or three husbands. A good many women are out of heterosexual circulation because they have homosexual group marriages, the *iycha*, three or four or more women. We haven't found a male equivalent yet—"

"Anyway," said Riel, "Aketa is one of Ket's husbands. His name means something like Ket's-kin-first-husband. Kin, meaning they're in the same volcano lineage. He was down the valley in Sponta when we first arrived."

"And he's a priest, a high one, we think. Maybe because

he's Ket's husband, and she's certainly an important one. But most of the really prestigious priesthoods seem to be for men. Probably to compensate for lack of child-bearing."

The anger rose up again in Shan, rage now, hatred. Who were these man-haters to lecture him on gender and womb-envy? Like a sea wave the hatred filled him with salt bitterness, and sank away, and was gone. He sat with his fragile sisters in the sunlight on the stone, and looked at the heavy, impossible book open on Forest's lap.

After a long time he said, "What does it say?"

"I only know a word here and there. Aketa wanted me to have it for a while. He's been teaching us. Mostly I look at the pictures. Like a baby." She showed him the small, brightly painted, gilded picture on the open page: men in wonderful robes and headdresses, dancing, under the purple slopes of Iyananam.

"Dalzul thought they were pre-literate," he said. "He has to see this."

"He has seen it," Riel said.

"But—" Shan began, and was silent.

"Long long ago on Terra," Riel said, "one of the first anthropologists took a man from a tiny, remote, very primitive Arctic tribe to a huge city, New York City. The thing that most impressed this very intelligent tribesman about New York City were the knobs on the bottom posts of staircases. He studied them with deep interest. He wasn't interested in the vast buildings, the streets full of crowds, the machines. . . ."

"We wonder if the churten problem centers not on impressions only, but expectations," Forest said. "We make sense of the world intentionally. Faced with chaos, we seek or make the familiar, and built up the world with it. Babies do it, we all do it, we filter out most of what our senses report. We're conscious only of what we need to be or want to be conscious of. In churten, the universe dissolves. As we come out, we reconstruct it—frantically. Grabbing at things we recognize. And once one part of it is there, the rest gets built on that."

"I say 'I,'" said Riel, "and an infinite number of sentences could follow. But the next word begins to build the immutable syntax. 'I want—' By the last word of the sentence, there may be no choice at all. And also, you can only use words you know."

"That's how we came out of the chaos experience on the *Shoby*," Shan said. His head had begun suddenly to ache, a painful, irregular throb at the temples. "We talked. We constructed the syntax of the experience. We told our story."

"And tried very hard to tell it truly," Forest said.

After a pause, pressing the pressure points on his temples, Shan said, "You're saying that Dalzul has been lying?"

"No. But—is he telling the Ganam story or the Dalzul story? The childlike, simple people acclaiming him king, the beautiful princess offering herself . . ."

"But she did—"

"It's her job. Her vocation. She's one of these priests, an important one. Her title is Anam. Dalzul translated it princess. We think it means earth. The earth, the ground, the world. She is Ganam's earth, receiving the stranger in honor. But there's more to it—this reciprocal function,

which Dalzul interprets as kingship. They simply don't have kings. It must be some kind of priesthood role as Anam's mate. Not Ket's husband, but her mate when she's Anam. But we don't know. We don't know what responsibility he's taken on."

"And we may be inventing just as much of it as Dalzul is," Riel said. "How can we be sure?"

"If we have you back to compare notes with, it'll be a big relief," said Forest. "We need you."

So does he, Shan thought. He needs my help, they need my help. What help have I to give? I don't know where I am. I know nothing about this place. I know the stone is warm and rough under the palm of my hand.

I know these two women are sympathetic, intelligent, trying to be honest.

I know Dalzul is a great man, not a foolish egoist, not a liar.

I know the stone is rough, the sun is warm, the shadow cool. I know the slight, sweet taste of tipu seeds, the crunch between the teeth.

I know that when he was thirty, Dalzul was worshipped as God. No matter how he disavowed that worship, it must have changed him. Growing old, he would remember what it was to be a king. . . .

"Do we know anything at all about this priesthood he's supposed to fill, then?" he asked harshly.

"The key word seems to be 'todok,' stick or staff or scepter. Todoghay, the one who holds the scepter, is the title. Dalzul got that right. It does sound like a king. But we don't think it means ruling people."

"Day-to-day decisions are made by the councils," Riel said. "The priests educate and lead ceremony and—keep the city in spiritual balance?"

"Sometimes, possibly, by blood sacrifice," Forest said. "We don't know what they've asked him to do! But it does seem he'd better find out."

After a while Shan sighed. "I feel like a fool," he said. "Because you fell in love with Dalzul?" Forest's black eyes gazed straight into his. "I honor you for it. But I think he needs your help."

When he left, walking slowly, he felt Forest and Riel watch him go, felt their affectionate concern following him, staying with him.

He headed back for the big market square. We must tell our story together, he told himself. But the words were hollow.

I must *listen*, he thought. Not talk, not tell. Be still.

He listened as he walked in the streets of Ganam. He tried to look, to see with his eyes, to feel, to be in his own skin in this world, in this world, itself. Not his world, not Dalzul's, or Forest's or Riel's, but this world as it was in its recalcitrant and irreducible earth and stone and clay, its dry bright air, its breathing bodies and thinking minds. A vendor was calling wares in a brief musical phrase, five beats, tataBANaba, and an equal pause, and the call again, sweet and endless. A woman passed him and Shan saw her, saw her absolutely for a moment: short, with muscular arms and hands, a preoccupied look on her wide face with its thousand tiny wrinkles etched by the sun on the pottery smoothness of the skin. She strode past him, pur-

poseful, not noticing him, and was gone. She left behind her an indubitable sense of being. Of being herself. Unconstructed, unreadable, unreachable. The other. Not his to understand.

All right then. Rough stone warm against the palm, and a five-beat measure, and a short old woman going about her business. It was a beginning.

I've been dreaming, he thought. Ever since we got here. Not a nightmare like the *Sbody*. A good dream, a sweet dream. But was it my dream or his? Following him around, seeing through his eyes, meeting Viaka and the others, being feasted, listening to the music . . . Learning their dances, learning to drum with them . . . Learning to cook . . . Pruning orchards . . . Sitting on my terrace, eating tipu seeds . . . A sunny dream, full of music and trees and simple companionship and peaceful solitude. My good dream, he thought, surprised and wry. No kingship, no beautiful princess, no rivals for the throne. I'm a lazy man. With lazy dreams. I need Tai to wake me up, make me vibrate, irritate me. I need my angry woman, my unforgiving friend.

Forest and Riel weren't a bad substitute. They were certainly friends, and though they forgave his laziness they had jolted him out of it.

An odd question appeared in his mind: Does Dalzul know we're here? Apparently Forest and Riel don't exist for him as women; do I exist for him as a man?

He did not try to answer the question. My job, he thought, is to try to jolt him. To put a bit of dissonance in the harmony, to syncope the beat. I'll ask him to dinner and talk to him, he thought.

Middle-aged, majestic, hawknosed, fierce-faced, Aketa was the most mild and patient of teachers. "Todokyu nkenes ebegebyu," he repeated for the fifth or sixth time, smiling.

"The scepter—something—is full of? has mastery over? represents?" said Forest.

"Is connected with—symbolizes?" said Riel.

"Kenes!" Shan said. "Electric! That's the word they kept using at the generator. Power!"

"The scepter symbolizes power?" said Forest. "Well, what a revelation. *Shit!*"

"*Shit.*" Aketa repeated, evidently liking the sound of the word. "*Shit!*"

Shan went into mime, dancing a waterfall, imitating the motion of wheels, the hum and buzz of the little dynamo up on the volcano. The two women stared at him as he roared, turned, hummed, buzzed, and cracked, shouting "Kenes?" at intervals like a demented chicken. But Aketa's smile broadened. "Soha, *kenes*," he agreed, and mimicked the leap of a spark from one fingertip to another. "Todokyu nkenes ebegebyu."

"The scepter signifies, symbolizes electricity! It must mean something like—if you take up the scepter you're the electricity priest—like Aketa's the library priest and Agot's the calendar priest—right?"

"It would make sense," Forest said.

"Why would they pick Dalzul straight off as their chief electrician?" Riel asked.

"Because he came out of the sky, like lightning!" said Shan.

"Did they pick him?" Forest asked.

There was a pause. Aketa looked from one to the other, alert and patient.

"What's 'choose'?" Forest asked Riel, who said, "Sotot."

Forest turned to their teacher. "Aketa: Dazu . . . ntodok . . . sotot?"

Aketa was silent for some time and then said, gravely and clearly, "Soha. Todok nDazu oyo sotot."

"Yes. And also the scepter chooses Dazul," Riel murmured.

"Aheco?" Shan demanded—why? But of Aketa's answer they could understand only a few words: priesthood or vocation, sacredness, the earth.

"Anam," Riel said—"Ket? Anam Ket?"

Aketa's pitch-black eyes met hers. Again he was silent, and the quality of his silence held them all still. When he spoke it was with sorrow. "Ai Dazul!" he said. "Ai Dazu kesemmas!"

He stood up, and knowing what was expected, they too rose, thanked him quietly for his teaching, and filed out. Obedient children, Shan thought. Good pupils. Learning what knowledge?

\* \* \*

That evening he looked up from his practice on the little Gaman finger-drum, to which Abud liked to listen, sitting with him on the terrace, sometimes singing a soft chant when he caught a familiar beat.

"Abud," he said, "metu?"—a word?

Abud, who had got used to the inquiry in the last few days, said, "Soha." He was a humorless, even-natured young man; he tolerated all Shan's peculiarities, perhaps, Shan thought, because he really hardly noticed them.

"Kesemmas," Shan said.

"Ah," said Abud, and repeated the word, and then went off slowly and relentlessly into the incomprehensible. Shan had learned to watch him rather than trying to catch the words. He listened to the tone, saw the gestures, the expressions. The earth, down, low, digging? The Gaman buried their dead. Dead, death? He mimed dying, a corpse; but Abud never understood his charades, and stared blankly. Shan gave up, and pattered out the dance-rhythm of yesterday's festival on the drum. "Soha, soha," said Abud.

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"I've never actually spoken to Ket," Shan said to Dazul.

It had been a good dinner. He had cooked it, with considerable assistance from Abud, who had prevented him just in time from frying the fezuni. Eaten raw, dipped in fiery pepperjuice, the fezuni had been delicious. Abud had eaten with them, respectfully silent as he always was in Dazul's presence, and then excused himself. Shan and Dazul were now nibbling tipu seeds and drinking nut beer, sitting on little carpets on the terrace in the purple twilight, watching the stars slowly clot the sky with brilliance.

"All men except the chosen king are taboo to her," Dazul said.

"But she's married," Shan said—"isn't she?"

"No, no. The princess must remain virgin until the king is chosen. Then she belongs only to him. The sacred marriage, the hierogamy."

"They do practice polyandry," Shan said uncertainly.

"Her union with him is probably the fundamental event of the kingship ceremonial. Neither has any real choice in the matter. That's why her defection is so troubling. She's breaking her own society's rules." Dazul took a long draft of beer. "What made me their choice in the first place—my dramatic appearance out of the sky—may be working against me now. I broke the rules by going away, and then coming back, and not coming back alone. One supernatural person pops out of the sky, all right, but four of them, male and female, all eating and drinking and shitting like everybody else, and asking stupid questions in babytalk all the time? We aren't behaving in a properly sacred manner. And they respond by impropriety of the same order, rule-breaking. Primitive worldviews are rigid, they break when strained. We're having a disintegrative effect on this society. And I am responsible."

Shan took a breath. "It isn't your world, sir," he said. "It's theirs. They're responsible for it." He cleared his throat. "And they don't seem all that primitive—they make steel, their grasp of the principles of electricity is impressive—and they are literate, and the social system seems to be very flexible and stable, if what Forest said—"

"I still call her the princess, but as I learn the language better I'll realize that that's inaccurate," Dazul said, setting down his cup and speaking musingly. "Queen is probably nearer: queen of Ganam, of the Gaman. She is identified as Ganam, as the soil of the planet itself."

"Yes," Shan said. "Riel says—"

"So that in a sense she is the Earth. As, in a sense, I am Space, the sky. Coming alone to this world, a conjunction. A mystic union: fire and air with soil and water. The old mythologies enacted yet again in living flesh. She cannot turn away from me. It dislocates the very order of things. The father and the mother are joined, their children are obedient, happy, secure. But if the mother rebels, disorder, distress, failure ensue. These responsibilities are absolute. We don't choose them. They choose us. She must be brought back to her duty to her people."

"As Forest and Riel understand it, she's been married to Aketa for several years, and her second husband is the father of her daughter." Shan heard the harshness of his voice; his mouth was dry and his heart pounding as if he was afraid, of what? of being disobedient?

"Viaka says he can bring her back to the palace," Dazul said, "but at risk of retaliation from the pretender's faction."

"Dazul?" Shan said. "Ket is a married woman, she went back to her family! Her duty to you as Earth priestess or whatever it is is done. Aketa is her husband, not your rival. He doesn't want the scepter, the crown, whatever it is!"

Dazul made no reply and his expression was unreadable in the deepening twilight.

Shan went on, desperately: "Until we understand this society better, maybe you should hold back—certainly not let Viaka kidnap Ket—"

"I'm glad you see that," Dazul said. "Although I can't help my involvement, we certainly must try not to interfere with these people's belief systems. Power is responsibility, alas! Well, I should be off. Thank you for a very pleasant evening, Shan. We can still sing a tune together,

eh, shipmates?" He stood up and patted the air on the back, saying, "Good night, Forest; good night, Riel," before he patted Shan on the back and said, "Good night and thanks, Shan!" He strode out of the courtyard, a lithe, erect figure, a white glimmer in the starlit dark.

\* \* \*

"I think we've got to get him onto the ship, Forest. He's increasingly delusional." Shan squeezed his hands together till the knuckles cracked. "I think he's delusional. Maybe I am. But you and Riel and I, we seem to be in the same general reality—fiction—are we?"

Forest nodded grimly. "Increasingly so," she said. "And if kesemmas does mean dying, or murder—Riel thinks it's murder, it involves violence. . . . I have this horrible vision of poor Dalzul committing some awful ritual sacrifice, cutting somebody's throat while convinced that he's pouring out oil or cutting cloth or something harmless. I'd be glad to get him out of this! I'd be glad to get out myself. But how?"

"Surely if the three of us—"

"Reason with him?" Forest asked, sardonic.

\* \* \*

When they went to what he called the palace, they had to wait a long time to see Dalzul. Old Viaka, anxious and nervous, tried to send them away, but they waited. Dalzul came out into his courtyard at last and greeted Shan. He did not acknowledge or did not perceive Riel and Forest. If he was acting, it was a consummate performance; he moved without awareness of their physical presence and talked through their speech. When at last Shan said, "Forest and Riel are here, Dalzul—here—look at them!"—Dalzul looked where he gestured and then looked back at Shan with such shocked compassion that Shan lost his own bearings and turned to see if the women were still there.

Dalzul, watching him, spoke very gently: "It's about time we went back, Shan."

"Yes—Yes, I think so—I think we ought to." Tears of pity, relief, shame jammed in Shan's throat for a moment. "We should go back. It isn't working."

"Very soon," Dalzul said, "very soon now. Don't worry, Shan. Anxiety increases the perceptual anomalies. Just take it easy, as you did at first, and remember that you've done nothing wrong. As soon as the coronation has—"

"No! We should go now—"

"Shan, whether I asked for it or not, I have an obligation here, and I will fulfil it. If I run out on them, Aketa's faction will have their swords out—"

"Aketa doesn't have a sword," Riel said, her voice high and loud as Shan had never heard it. "These people don't have swords, they don't make them!" Dalzul talked on through her voice: "As soon as the ceremony is over and the kingship is filled, we'll go. After all, I can go and be back within an hour, if need be. I'll take you back to Ve Port. In no time at all, as the joke is. So stop worrying about what never was your problem. I got you into this. It's my responsibility."

"How can—" Shan began, but Forest's long, black hand was on his arm.

"Don't try, Shan," she said. "The mad reason much better than the sane. Come on. This is very hard to take."

Dalzul was turning serenely away, as if they had left him already.

"Either we have to wait for this ceremony with him," Forest said as they went out into the hot, bright street, "or we knock him on the head and stick him in the ship."

"I'd like to knock him on the head," Riel said.

"If we do get him onto the ship," Shan said, "how do we know he'll take us back to Ve? And if he turns round and comes right back, how do we know what he'll do? He could destroy Ganam instead of saving it—"

"Shan! Riel said, "Stop it! Is Ganam a world? Is Dalzul a god?"

He stared at her. A couple of women going by looked at them, and one nodded a greeting. "Ha, Foyest Ha, Yeh!"

"Ha, Tasasap!" Forest said to her, while Riel, her eyes blazing, faced Shan: "Ganam is one little city-state on a large planet, which the Ganam call Anam, and the people in the next valley call something else entirely. We've seen one tiny corner of it. It'll take us years to know anything about it. Dalzul, because he's crazy or because churtening made him crazy or made us all crazy, I don't know which, I don't care just now—Dalzul barged in and got mixed up in sacred stuff and maybe is causing some trouble and confusion. But these people *live* here, this is their place. One man can't destroy them and one man can't save them! They have their own story, and *they're* telling it! How we'll figure in it I don't know—maybe as some idiots that fell out of the sky once!"

Forest put a peaceable arm around Riel's shoulders.

"When she gets excited she gets excited. Come on, Shan. Aketa certainly isn't planning to slaughter Viaka's household. I don't see these people letting us mess up anything in a big way. They're in control. We'll go through this ceremony. It probably isn't a big deal, except in Dalzul's mind. And as soon as it's over and his mind's at rest, ask him to take us home. He'll do it. He's—" She paused.

"He's fatherly," she said, without sarcasm.

\* \* \*

They did not see Dalzul again until the day of the ceremony. He stayed holed up in his palace, and Viaka sternly forbade them entrance. Aketa evidently had no power to interfere in another sacred jurisdiction, and no wish to.

"Tezeme," he said, which meant something on the order of "it is happening the way it is supposed to happen." He did not look happy about it, but he was not going to interfere.

On the morning of the Ceremony of the Scepter, there was no huying and selling in the market place. People came out in their finest kilts and gorgeous vests; all the men of the priesthoods wore the high, plumed, basketry headdresses and massive gold earrings. Babies' and children's heads were rubbed with red ochre. But it was not a festivity, such as the Star-Rising ceremony of a few days earlier; nobody danced, nobody cooked tipu-head, there was no music. Only a large, rather subdued crowd kept gathering in the market place. At last the doors of Aketa's house—Ket's house, actually, Riel reminded them—swung open, and a procession came forth, walking to the complex, thrilling, somber beat of drums. The drummers had been waiting in the streets behind the house, and came

forward to walk behind the procession. The whole city seemed to shake to the steady, heavy rhythms.

Shan had never seen Ket except on the ship's tape of Dalzul's first arrival, but he recognized her at once in the procession: a stern, splendid woman. She wore a head-dress less elaborate than most of the men's, but ornate with gold, balancing it proudly as she walked. Beside her walked Aketa, red plumes nodding above his wicker crown, and another man to her left—"Ketkata, second husband," Riel murmured. "That's their daughter." The child was four or five, very dignified, pacing along with her parents, her dark hair rough and red with ochre. "All the priests in Ket's volcano lineage are here," Riel went on. "There's the Earth-Turner. That old one, that's the Calendar Priest. There's a lot of them I don't know. This is a *bfg* ceremony. . . ." Her whisper was a little shaky.

The procession turned left out of the market place and moved on to the heavy beating of the drums until Ket came abreast of the main entrance of Viaka's rambling, yellow-walled house. There, with no visible signal, everyone stopped walking at once. The drums maintained the heavy, complex beat; but one by one they dropped out, till one throbbled alone like a heart and then stopped, leaving a terrifying silence.

A man with a towering headdress of woven feathers stepped forward and called out a summons: "Sem ayatan! Sem Dazul!"

The door opened slowly. Dazul stood framed in the sunlit doorway, darkness behind him. He wore his black and silver uniform. His hair shone silver.

In the absolute silence of the crowd, Ket walked forward to face him. She knelt down on both knees, bowed her head, and said, "Dazu, sototiyul!"

"Dazul, you chose," Riel whispered.

Dazul smiled. He stepped forward and reached out his hands to lift Ket to her feet.

A whisper ran like wind in the crowd, a hiss or gasp or sigh of shock. Ket's gold-burdened head came up, startled, then she was on her feet, fiercely erect, her hands at her sides. "Sototiyul!" she said, and turned, and strode back to her husbands.

The drums took up a soft patter, a rain-sound.

A gap opened in the procession just in front of the door of the house. Quiet and self-possessed, walking with great dignity, Dazul came forward and took the place left open for him. The rain-sound of the drums grew louder, turning to thunder, thunder rolling near and far, loud and low. With the perfect unanimity of a school of fish or flock of birds the procession moved forward.

The people of the city followed, Shan, Riel, and Forest among them.

"Where are they going?" Forest said as they left the last street and struck out on the narrow road between the orchards.

"This road goes up Iyananam," Shan said.

"Onto the volcano? Maybe that's where the ritual will be."

The drums beat, the sunlight beat, Shan's heart beat, his feet struck the dust of the road, all in one huge pulse. Entrained. Thought and speech lost in the one great beat, beat, beat.

The procession had halted. The followers were stopping. The three Terrans kept on until they came up alongside the procession itself. It was reforming, the drummers drawing off to one side, a few of them softly playing the thunder-roll. Some of the crowd, people with children, were beginning to go back down the steep trail beside the mountain stream. Nobody spoke, and the noise of the waterfall uphill from them and the noisy torrent nearby almost drowned out the drums.

They were a hundred paces or so downhill from the little stone building that housed the dynamo. The plumed priests, Ket and her husbands and household, all had drawn aside, leaving the way clear to the bank of the stream. Stone steps were built down right to the water, and at their foot lay a terrace, paved with light-colored stone, over which the clear water washed in quick-moving, shallow sheets. Amidst the shine and motion of the water stood an altar or low pedestal, blinding bright in the noon sun: gilt or solid gold, carved and drawn into intricate and fantastic figures of crowned men, dancing men, men with diamond eyes. On the pedestal lay a wand, not gold, unornamented, of dark wood or tarnished metal.

Dazul began to walk towards the pedestal.

Aketa stepped forward suddenly and stood at the head of the stone steps, blocking Dazul's way. He spoke in a ringing voice, a few words. Riel shook her head, not understanding. Dazul stood silent, motionless, and made no reply. When Aketa fell silent, Dazul strode straight forward, as if to walk through him.

Aketa held his ground. He pointed to Dazul's feet. "Tediad!" he said sharply—"Shoes," Riel murmured. Aketa and all the Gaman in the procession were barefoot. After a moment, with no loss of dignity, Dazul knelt, took off his shoes and stockings, set them aside, and stood up, barefoot in his black uniform.

"Stand aside now," he said quietly, and as if understanding him, Aketa stepped back among the watchers.

"Ai Dazu," he said as Dazul passed him, and Ket said softly, "Ai Dazu!" The soft murmur followed Dazul as he paced down the steps and out onto the terrace, walking through the shallow water that broke in bright drops around his ankles. Unhesitating, he walked to the pedestal and around it, so that he faced the procession and the watching people. He smiled, and put out his hand, and seized the scepter.

\* \* \*

"No," Shan said. "No, we had no spy-eye with us. Yes, he died instantly. No, I have no idea what voltage. Underground wires from the generator, we assume. Yes, of course it was deliberate, intentional, arranged. They thought he had chosen that death. He chose it when he chose to have sex with Ket, with the Earth Priestess, with the Earth. They thought he knew, how could they know he didn't know? If you lie with the Earth you die by the Lightning. Men come from a long way to Ganim for that death. Dazul came from a very long way. No, we none of us understood. No, I don't know if it had anything to do with the churten effect, with perceptual dissonance, with chaos. We came to see things differently, but which of us knew the truth? He knew he had to be a god again." ♦

# Hellado



Illustration by Ron Walotsky

## James Lawson

Hey, don't give me no silly smile like that, man. You want to hear the *verdad* story, I'm giving you the *verdad* story. Why would I make something like that up? I ain't that smart. Besides, no way could I make up something worse than what really happened.

Sure I'm sad. Like, Chuy, he was a friend of mine, *sabe*? Good friend. BTS amigo, you know? But the way I see it, what happened was his own fault.

If he hadn't been so smart, he wouldn't be where he is.

\* \* \*

I met Chuy in the Hermosillo juvie Rehab. He'd been there almost a year and they had to let him go because he was gonna turn eighteen. Personally, I think they were getting rid of him because they couldn't make him, you know? He was so damn smart. Street smart, the psychs said. Too smart to waste. So they kept sending



him home, and he kept coming back. They'd warn him, and he'd smile, and promise he wouldn't get in no trouble, and in a few months he'd be back.

Me, I was in for lifting galads from cars. You know: gallium-arsenide storage batteries? *Estúpido*. Too heavy work for me, the federales said when they caught me trying to fence a load, and they laughed. *Pendejidad*. Chuy and I met in the Rehab library. It was inevitable. Good word, inevitable. There was nobody else there. Rehab citizens tend to fill up the bigscreen vit room, and the mess hall, and the athletic facilities, but they got this tendency to avoid the library. So there was just the two of us, and we saw each other and started talkin', and when Chuy found out I was BTS too . . . that means you're from Bahía Todos Santos harbor, Enseñada Arcomple . . . it was easy natural from there. Turned out we'd even scoped some of the same neighborhoods.

I knew right away Chuy had plenty of *cerebro*, and not just because he was getting out. He talked smart, could speak English and Spanish as well as the patois, and he had money. The federales could send him to Rehab, but not his money. He knew several fences, but he was the one who'd taken the kosh . . . you know; kosher cash? Laundered money? . . . and stashed it in down in Panama. You don't expect a mouthy little bayboy to know about stuff like that. I was pretty impressed.

When Chuy found out my hobby was singing the credit electric, we easy started talking some heavy work-release program, you know? I knew stuff he didn't, and he knew the street a lot better than me. Problemo was, he was getting out soon and if I wanted to scope with him I had to do the same.

So I started paying serious attention to my situation, which meant I had to start listening to Trisha Varese, my case worker, instead of just mumbaling "chure" to everything she said while concentrating on her *tetas*. I can say "sure" as well as any pure anglo, but they think it's cute when you say "chure."

Man, you'd have been proud of me, I was so damn repentant! I mean, I expiated all *over* the place. And "chure" enough, they let me out a day *before* Chuy. I was there waiting for him at the gate when they let him out, and I ream-raved him pretty good about it. He handled it with a grin . . . that was one of his talents . . . and then he took me to an AT and used a card and drew out about a thousand American dollars. That shut me up real quick.

We caught the first commuter out of Hermosillo non-stop back to good old BTS. I got to admit I choked a little when we banked over Point Banda on approach to Enseñada, seeing the big *babia* spread out all pale blue like coconut flavoring against the rusty rim of docks and container tracks and cranes, with the city and the mountains in the background and the yellow sand stretching south toward Cabo Colnett like a Zapotec carpet. But I kept it to myself. You can't call yourself a Big Tough Shit and bawl on a commuter vertiprop in front of a bunch of sponge-faced cleanies.

My mother was glad to see me, but it wasn't much of a reunion. She was late for work and it didn't leave a lot of time for talk. You know what the Strip's like, man. There's

eight million cleanies workin' the maquiladora plants and five times as many as that in places like the CenAm and Colombia and points south would sell their sorry selves for a chance at the least of those jobs. So *mi madre* said hello and hugged me and excused herself so's she could maybe make the seven-quarter induction shuttle north to work. My kid brother and sister were in day school; not that I'd hang with them anyway.

Don't *miscomprende*: I love my siblings. But a BTS wouldn't be caught dead tending no kids.

No, first thing, I went looking for Lita. She's no vit star beauty, my Lita, but she's easy on the eyes, and kissing her is like chug-a-lugging a half-liter of salsa. More important, she likes me. Actually, I think maybe she loves me, but I'm careful not to wade in those waters.

"Hey, 'Stebo, when they let you out?" Then she throws herself in my arms, which is hard for me to handle 'cause she's bigger than me and it would look bad for me to stagger, *comprende*? We talk, and go cruise the Pershing Villa Mall, and I buy her dinner, and we talk some more, until the moon is startin' to work on the second half of its shift. Then when things are all nice and warm and settled we wait on down to Ostras Beach for a little *Californico* Sur body surfing, you know what I mean? Just beach; no *agua*. After those months in Rehab I was more than ready for a little slip 'n' slide.

Later we lie on our backs on the sand thinking how nice it was of God to make the moon pretty as well as functional.

While Lita talks I lie there all tired and warm-worn an' let her voice run all over me like saguaro honey. The words I try to ignore.

"You gonna get a good job, 'Stebo. Make some honest money. You so smart; I know you can do it."

I listen to this with my ears and my eyes, but my mind is someplace else. See, Lita, she likes me a lot, and I think she wants to get married and have a house and kids and all that cleanie stuff. But me, I don't want that. What do I want a couple rugrats hanging on me all the time? I argue with her, and then I just give up and nod. It's easier that way, man, and it makes her happy.

We find another wave, and paddle like mad, an' this time I wait for her.

Next morning she's all smiles an' winks when she goes off to her crummy job and I relax 'cause I can forget about the *otra*. Till next time. I mean, I'm a BTS, man. I don't need no family mucking my business.

But as the hot days pass she keeps buggin' me, so I start thinking about it serious. Until Chuy come looking for me, and I explain to Lita that I got to go with him. My friend needs me. And just like I'm afraid she will, sure enough she starts crying and yelling.

"What kind of friend can you make in Rehab, you dumb schmuckito? You don't need to be hanging with no *ninlocos*! This Chuy guy, he's gonna get you screwed all over again and then what am I gonna do?"

She's really makin' rain, so I try to comfort her and reassure her, explain that Chuy's no *ninloco*, he's smarter than that, smart enough not to get involved with no street gang. Maybe's he an antisoc, but what's the big

deal with that? Half the people in the Strip are antisocs. At least he ain't no weird. But she pulls away from me and tells me to get out, go on, get lost, I ain't gonna amount to nothing because of the people I hang with. I know she'll get over it, she always does, but it's hard, 'cause see, I really like her. Deep.

Chuy takes me in this old car that he drives around in even though he could buy a Shogunner because, he explains, the federales would start hanging right with a young guy in a Shogunner, spizzing him and making him crazy, and while this heap may not look so good, it's a hell of a lot more sophic. It's late, and we head for the back of the docks, where the light induction assembly yards are.

They're big, the induction yards. Container and cargo ships from all over the Pacif offload their cargoes there. Carriers from Old Nippon, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia and China swap components and chippies and assembly packs and wafers and take on finished goods, cables and connectors, and agriblocks for transport home.

The containers slide right off the ships onto flexible maglev loading arms. You've seen 'em: big stelacrete and fiber-composite tentacles, four to an operator's cabin. The containers are already content- and destination-coded and those macho operators, the real good ones, can toss ten-ton containers around like square baseballs.

Most of them end up in the distribution yards, waiting for a slot out. The yard 'putters stack them into trains for redundancy value and when they've got enough headed in more or less the same direction, they send them off north to San Juana or Agua Pri or Yumarado or Elpaso or the Navahopi nation. The already assembled, finished goods that come pan-Pacif go straight to Frisco or LaLa.

The Bay and Ensenada City are the harvest ground for the whole western two-thirds of the Strip. All those fancy vits and consumer electronics the cleanies hunger for are assembled in the Strip, using Strip cheapa labor and Zonic engineering. It's a helluva place. *Mi madre's* job is up there. She does okay considering my stinkin' run-off *pendejo* of an old man never sends no money to her. Okay, yeah; but she has to work like a dog. Ten people waiting to get her job.

We pull into one of the big public cleanie commute lots and start to cruise, slow and easy. Chuy knows where he's going, I can tell, and the closer we get to where he's going the quieter he gets. Maybe his mouth's shut, but his eyes are moving all the time. Bright black eyes, like dancing ball bearings. He's real *serioso* now and so I keep quiet, trying to watch for I don't know what.

Then this little smile spreads over his face. If I forget everything else about him I'll always remember that smile, like a guy on a date who's spent a lot of money and has worked real hard to sound sincere and has just figured out he's gonna get laid. He pulls over next to a nice, shiny Sodan coupe, maybe a year old. I flash the two guys in the front seat, one a slant and the other a big blond anglo who don't look like he belongs within a hundred kims of the place. They're flashing me back like they're trying to swim the Golfo from Guyamas to San Blas and I'm a weight tied to their ankles.

The anglo looks unhappy. I keep my expression carefully neutral, but I already hate him for his good looks. "Modal, Chuy. Who's the *buffo*?" I stiffened but said nothing.

"Take it easy. We hung in Rehab together."

The other two relax a little. So do I. "Oh, I guess that's okay, then." He sneers at me. "What can you do besides make goofy expressions, *buffo*?"

Before I can reply Chuy steps in. "He's mode. I think he's a tweeck."

The Sodan drivers exchange a look. It's clear this they don't expect. I'm inordinately pleased.

"We don't need no stinkin' tweeck," the slant mutters.

"Just because we never had one before don't mean we can't use one," Chuy tells him. I can tell he's getting irritated. So can the slant, because he doesn't say anything else. Chuy climbs out, locks his boost-a-wreck. I notice it's got a cute little peapod gelpung under the ignition that'll blow the fingers off anybody dumb enough to try and skrag it. I imitate his withdrawal. We pile into the Sodan.

I check out the interior, note the origin stains: stupid, easily bypassed dash security; elaborate satellite mapping system above the CD player, revolving token holder for the toll highways. I reframe this ain't the anglo's cruiser, and I say so. "Where'd you skrag this gordo, goldilocks?"

The anglo looks angry for a second, then nods in grudging approval. "Not around here. You think I'm a *buffo* like you?"

"Naw," I reply, displaying a bravado I don't feel. The anglo is twice my size, stuffed full of steroid-rich cereal. "I think you're a *buffo* like yourself."

It's his turn to stiffen, but it's hard to unload on somebody when you're in the front seat and they're in the back. Then he grins and extends a hand back toward me. The palm is soft, like a vitwit's.

"Kilbee. You know? Like the killer bees?"

From behind the half-wheel on the driver's side the slant sniffs. "It's really Kirby, but you know these anglos. Delusions of grandeur. I'm Huong. Long Huong to my lady friends."

"In what slum?" I shoot back, and just like that I'm one of the pack, no longer an outsider. Huong starts the Sodan and the big reveriscent electric motor purrs like a telenovela tar wound too tight. We ease out of the lot, heading toward the main induction distribution yard on the eastern fringe of the Arcomplex. I've already got it figured, but Chuy explains anyway.

"Don't like to leave our real transportation too close to our place of business." He's smiling, but tense now. Getting close to work time, I figure.

We pull up to the deserted four-lane gate. Faking a high, Huong weaves as he sticks a card into a read-only. While we wait nobody says anything. A moment later the reo regurgitates his gard and the gate pops sweet as an electric cherry. I see them all relax.

"Card cost a lot of money," Chuy tells me as we roll in. "Kilbee got it in LaLa."

"My folks are never home," the anglo explains. "Took me weeks to set up delivery."

"Where do they think you are, your folks?"

"Studying business at UC Escondido. They're out of town so much they could know less. Much less care." His expression was not fraught with filial love.

We pull as far into the lot as possible and Huong parks next to half a dozen empty vehicles. Kilbee reaches under his seat and extracts a big package. He opens the top and hands me a soft lump.

"Left side, near the bottom," Chuy elucidates as he slides to his right. "You can find it with your fingers. Be ready to slip out as it expands."

I eye the lump, find the switch. "You're kidding. What the hell's this?"

Chuy gestures to his left, toward a steel tower on the far side of the lot. "Spy vit up there, covers the whole tar mac. It'll show at least two people in this car. Have to be two here at all times. Probably don't need it, but I don't like to take chances if there's a better way."

"Ready, it's swinging." Huong is looking casually to his left. "Now!"

I flip the switch I've been fingering. The lump hisses like a screaming gila monster and starts to bloat. I frantically follow Chuy as he scrambles out the right side of the coupe and onto the pavement. Behind me, a pair of inflatable drunks expand to fill my seat and Huong's. They are extremely good likenesses. By the time the spy vit swings back past the Sedan they will be blown up to human size and occupying their seats. I can't repress a grin.

"Who thought this one up?"

"I did," said Chuy. "Got the idea off a vit. Hasn't failed so far. It's a redundancy, in case anyone at central security happened to have noticed us pulling in and gave a damn. This way it'll look like a couple of cleanies using the safe confines of the lot to sleep off a binge. Come on, and stay low. Not everything in here's auto. They have regular patrols, too."

As the camera swung back again, patient and ignorant, we scrambled toward the yard.

Hundreds of induction container cars rested on surface tracks, a labyrinth of composite stelaconcrete, plastic, composite fibers and metal. Chuy and the others seemed to know pretty much where they were going, though they stopped once to confer. I just tried to keep up and out of the way, watching and learning. At the north end of the yard the network converged into the heavy-use lines that ran toward the Strip. All around us was the constant hum of cars moving, disengaging, assembling into trains or breaking away, the sounds of maglev rails being switched on and off, clicks and buzzes, and pungent above it all the sweet jumbled stink of lubrication and ozone. I felt as if I'd stepped over a gap and fallen into a machine, wayward as a free electron.

We stopped outside a wall of six connected cars pointed north. Chuy kept watch while Huong and Kilbee plugged a battered notex into the access slot on the loading door and sped through combinations at twenty a second. I tried to look alert.

"How you know which car to pick?"

"Got to be one headed north. That's the easy part. The rest is experience, practice. Also, I got contacts. Tricky

business." I was shuffling nervously back and forth, and he indicated my feet. "Watch your step."

I knew what he was referring to. The center rail, where the exposed conducting magnets ran the length of the track, was fully charged. If I stumbled into it, made the slightest contact with it while it was pos, I'd be a long pig taco faster than tequila evaporates downtown on a national holiday.

The container cars sat on their track, vibrating infinitesimally as they awaited orders to move. The damn door finally clicked open. Chuy rose up and stepped back. "Move it, omhers!"

Huong and Kilbee disappeared within. Moments later they were tossing out long, flat rectangular boxes no thicker than slats. They were made of opaque molybdate, carefully labeled. I didn't waste time trying to read them. When Chuy and I each had one the intruding pair descended and we started running, fast and low, back to the lot.

Once there we waited, timing our rush to the Sedan. When Chuy gave the word we moved, into the coupe, deflating the balloon drunks and replacing them with our own selves. Huong drove sedately out of the lot.

At the city lot we abandoned the stolen coupe for Chuy's beat-up Mord. Only when we were back on a main street in town did the boys start whooping and hollering, exchanging raps and cries.

"Let's see what we got," said Chuy. He took a prier from a slim toolbox stored under the front seat and started working on the molybdate carton. The lid slid off smoothly and we saw that it was full of densely packed NISC optical leads. As were the other three slats. The last one we cracked contained doublet Mahatmas, gold-sealed and ready to install, each worth sixty Namerican dollars apiece wholesale underground according to Huong. There were fifty leads in the slat.

"What do you think, 'Stebos?" Chuy was beaming. "Not bad for a couple hours running around in the dark, eh? Better than snorting desdu, and safer."

"You did okay, *buffo*," said Kilbee grudgingly.

"Thanks. Then stop calling me *buffo*, okay?"

For the second time that night a big hand reached back over the seat.

It went like that week after week. We were doing pretty damn good. One night in July, when it was too hot even for the spy vit to move very fast, we skragged a whole box of custom-augmented lumin plates. Twenty-five of 'em, a thousand dollars a plate. Huong got so boned we had to pass him around three different moray holes just to get him hosed down.

But we each could've packed out a box. It bothered me. I thought I knew what the problem was, but I waited 'til I was sure before pushing it on Chuy. I was doing a lot of thinking since I'd been accepted into the troop, and I wanted to be positive.

"Yeah, we coulda taken four boxes," he told me over a couple of self-chilling Cabos at his place. It was out on the Point, in an expensive neighborhood, but not too flamboyant, if you know what I mean. Not right on the Pacif, but you could see it from his rooftop. Chuy himself, he

never used the sundeck. That was for crazy anglos who wanted to get as dark as the people they were always railing against.

"Then why didn't we?" I asked him. Looking out the second-floor window, I could see Huang and Kilbee down in the compact high-walled garden-yard, sitting under the misters with a couple of girls they'd picked up outside the International School of Management. Huang's lady looked like she was from Finland or something. Her skin was as pale as underwear on washday. The slant was partial to tall Europeans. Kilbee wasn't partial at all, so long as they had a waist. Friggin' equal-op employer.

"Because of the way the yard security's set up. We're like mosquitos, 'Stebo. You draw a little blood here, a little there, your target gets up irritated but not furious. You take too much at one time, you get squashed." He slugged cold Cabo. "I seen it happen. Compadre of mine, Esquivel Figuero, borrowed a six-wheel sloop. Slipped into the yard and filled it up with twelve crates of Miashi and Davidano thrummo components, real class noise-makers, that he took off a container from Surabaya. Skrag weighed about two hundred kilos, I guess. They busted him before he was halfway to the barrier."

"How?"

"*Mierde*, omber, those induction containers derop around on magnetic fields, right? So the weight of each container is checked and double-checked and recorded when its offloaded from a ship, and the weight goes into the monitoring 'puters along with the rest of the stats. Yard Security Central has a mass-weight record of every container as soon as it comes off the ship from whatever Skrantland it calls home. They're monitored twenty-four hours a day. A container's weight suddenly drops, even a little, and it sets off an alarm in Security that records the amount of weight loss even as it's identifying the specific container. The yardeyes swarm that container on foot and speedbikes so fast you don't have time to sneeze. Nobody gets out.

"That's why we never skrag more than twenty kilos of anything. It allows for about a ten-kilo margin, and we don't go over one decagram. Never. That's why I never been caught since I developed this little game. We take too little to miss. Sometimes we don't get much. A couple hundred. You seen it, you been in on it. But it's a gamble every time. I'd rather mess a guess and suffer a few terrible nights than end up busted and back in Hermosillo, or worse. Haven't been lucky. Just been careful.

"Other guys, they get too greedy. We take just a little at a time. Sometimes we don't get nothing. It's a tradeoff."

I nodded. "I been thinking, Chuy."

"Bout what, amigo?"

I sipped at my beer. "What if we could get around the weight problem somehow?"

Chuy frowned. "Don't get no funny ideas, omber. We do it my way or not at all. You want to freelance?"

"No, no. I'm as hesitant as you. But what if, like, what if I thought of a way where we could vacuum not a few kilos of compo, but a lot more? More than two hundred kilos. A whole container. How much could that be worth?"

Chuy belched, then blinked. "A whole car? Man, you crazy."

"Maybe, but I don't mind bein' rich an' crazy."

Chuy chuckled. "If my guy can't make two hundred kilos, a smart like him, how you gonna take a whole car? You'll set off every alarm in every induction security station between San Juana and La Paz."

I did a little B&D on my enthusiasm. I was pretty confident, but still. . . . "By convincing the system that the car isn't being skragged."

Chuy shook his head. "Now just how you gonna do that, omber?"

I sat up straight. Below, rising sounds indicated that Kilbee and Huang were deep in the hearta Mexas. "VR."

Chuy smiled. "That'd maybe fool the box vits, if you're good enough. But it doesn't affect the underlying analytics."

I leaned forward. "I'm not just talking virtual reality sight-wise. I'm thinkin' *virtual weight*."

Easing back in his chair, Chuy glanced amusedly out and down to where Kilbee was all over his girl. Kilbee always got all the best-looking ones. Damn anglo. "What the hell is virtual weight, man?"

"Something I been playing with, thinking about ever since you introed me to our fazz night games. See, before I got interested in splitting finitives, I wanted to be an artist. I can not only make a car look real through VR, I think I can make it feel real too, if I can get into the Distribution Yard main box."

Chuy was thinking hard, still doubtful. "Even if you can fool the yard box into thinking something's still there that ain't no more, the place's still gonna be full of yardeyes. You've done enough slips to know we got five, maybe ten minutes at the most to pull the old in-and-out before some Eye shows and makes us. So maybe you can work this thing and maybe you can't. It don't matter *un ratass* because we ain't got enough time to make it worth-while. And even if you did, we can only take what we can carry. We can't drive a van into the distribution yard, much less a truck. Esqui tried that and I told you what happen to him. The Eyes'd be all over us for unauthorized entry in a minute, even before you could start setting up. Best we can do is get a set of riffy wheels into the employee vehic lot, like you seen."

"We don't need ten minutes to skrag a container," I told him, having thought it all out as best I could before opening my mouth. "And we don't need a truck. We're not gonna vacuum the damn thing. You won't have to carry nothin', neither."

"The Eyes and vit cameras don't track the containers after they've been sent on their way and left the yard, and there ain't no vits on the main lines. Only box sensors. No point in tryin' to follow real-time pictures of containers snappin' past at three hundred per, so they just put up representations. Schematics. Virtuals. We can substitute our own damn virtuals, man. I can do virtuals like you never seen. That's the easy part. The trick's insertin' them into the network, foolin' the sensors when you sub the dupe, and givin' it stayin' power 'til we've safely skragged our load."

Chuy pondered some more. Then he chugged the rest

of his Cabo, wiped his lips, and smiled that little hard smile of his. "What you need to try this, miracle man?"

I told him. He repeated the list to himself, though I didn't know how sophisticated his knowledge was or in-  
deed if any of it would be familiar to him.

"Zenitrov portable, Komitsu modem, Digibm peripherals. The other stuff I don't recog. Sounds like you got expensive tastes."

"I didn't say it would come cheap. The Zenitrov's the only portable with enough crunch to handle the VR mass and the graphics." I waited.

Chuy watched condensation creep down the sides of his gold beer bottle, blotting the droplets with a fingertip. "You're talking a lot of money. What if Huong and Kilbee don't go along?"

I shrugged, feigning indifference. Inside, I was excited not merely by the possibilities but by the chance to really make use of the natural talents I'd developed in Rehab. "Well, Kilbee's always boasting how he can skrag some real money if he ever needs to. Maybe he'll make up any shortfall."

Chuy leaned forward. "But you better know what you doing, amigo, or else start looking for an easy route over the mountains."

I smiled, but I didn't feel that way inside. Chuy wasn't screwing around. Chuy never screwed around where money was concerned.

It took longer to set up the program than to acquire the necessary equipment, even though I'd spent weeks working out a lot of it in my head. Kilbee grumbled and Huong looked downright skeptical, but Chuy persuaded them. I spent a lot of time in the basement of Chuy's constricted, three-story codo, accessing the Arcomplex library under an assumed code and designing the probe. When I thought I was ready I did some practicing on small stuff and it all seemed to work, but cracking the inventory box at Nick's Liquor and Narcotics wasn't the same as what we were going to try.

There was no need for everyone to go along. In fact, with just Chuy and I we'd be that much less conspicuous. Huong and Kilbee watched doubtfully as Chuy and I rum-  
bled off beneath a quarter-moon in a stolen Solarmax.

Kilbee's fancy card got us into the employee lot at the distrib yard, like always. I made sure the backpack was secure on my shoulders. Then we blew up our drunk dolls, slid out of the car an' started into the yard, absent-  
ing among the clicks and hums of the hundreds of induc-  
tion containers.

I kept waiting for Chuy to pick a likely target. It seemed like it took him hours to make a decision, but inside he was as nervous as always, though not as nervous as me. Finally he stopped me next to a container with simple graphics.

"Don' look like much to me."

"Hey," he whispered in my face, "you leave the pick-  
ing to me. Now do it, if you're gonna. If you can."

I nodded and moved to the front of the container, searching along the edge while Chuy kept a restive, silent watch for roving Eyes. When I accessed the interlock I broke the seal and found myself looking at a heavy-duty

but pretty standard communications module. I slid the backpack off and took out the Zenitrov, fumbled clumsily with the peripherals while Chuy cursed me, my ideas, and my mother under his breath, trying not to nerve me but at the same time uneasy at hangin' in one place for so long. Containers rumbled and drifted around us.

I got in pretty fast, if I do say so myself. The distribu-  
tion yard box was big, lots of volume. What you'd expect for so complicated an operation. I munched the stats on this particular container right away, because I was plugged into it. That was the easy part. I floated around inside the box space, orienting myself until I felt comfortable. I knew I didn't have much time for sightseeing. Not with Chuy constantly prodding me in the ribs.

I worked the Zen's tactiles until I knew everything there was to know about the container I was into. It seemed pretty promising, but it was a little early to start gloating. We didn't have anything yet except a little access. First I subbed the program dupe I'd shaped, and that zeeped into the matrix smooth as lotion on a beach bunny's buns. So far, so *bueno*.

Implementation was a lot trickier. It's one thing to shape a program and insert it, another to get it up an' runnin' in the box. I grabbed the shipping info from the container and inverted it, got a good look at the struc-  
ture, and dumped it into the waiting template I'd so care-  
fully installed. Then I made kind of a silent prayer and plugged the template into the ass end of the container's up-and-run.

Chuy was tugging on my shoulder as I ran a couple of redundancy checks. "Come on, ombre! If you ain't done it by now, you ain't never going to. Let's get out of here." I pulled out, leaving nothing behind me in the distrib yard box but empty crunch, nothing to trace the tickle. I was fumbling to get the Zenitrov back into its holster as Chuy half-led, half-dragged me back through the yard. As we ran, making no noise in our expensive pylon skimmers, I could hear the voices of two Eyes just passing behind us and a chill went up my back. Too close, man.

Chuy didn't say nothing until we'd orphaned the stolen Solarmax and were back in his clunker. "So? How'd it go, 'Stebos?"

"I don' know."

His tone turned unfriendly. "What you mean, you don't know?"

I looked earnest. "No way to know if it worked until Thursday."

"Why Thursday?"

"I thought I explained it to you. Everything depends on the container's shipping instructions. Its stats said it's programmed to join a train heading north on Thursday at five pm. It won' move 'til then."

Chuy looked thoughtful. "So we can't do nothing but wait until then."

I nodded. " 'Til later, really. For when I set the tem-  
plate."

He sucked in a deep breath. "Amigo, it gonna be three nervous days."

He wasn't half as nervous all three days as I was that first hour.

Thursday *noche* found the four of us hanging near the receiving yard behind the Garcilaso Mall. Nothing unusual about that. The delivery area was bare except for a couple of empty containers. At two in the morning there was nobody around, not even an Eye. No reason for a patrol here. Even the Ensenada police didn't come around often. They didn't need to. There were easier places to break into than an armored, fully alarmed Mall, with its thermo-sensitive vits and animorphed dobermans. As for the loading dock, there was nothing there to steal.

Kilbee had actually rented the offloader transport. If some federalic did accidentally stumble onto us, we'd tell him we were just waiting to move a friend the next morning and couldn't sleep, so we'd decided to lay out for the night and suck a few sense sticks. Chuy an' Kilbee decided the story would sound better if it didn't come from four guys sitting in a stolen truck.

Huong tossed his stick stub through the window and glared at me. "I think you've just been pissing wind, 'Stebob. This ain't gonna work."

I checked my watch for the fourth time in the past half-hour. "It's not time yet, Huong. There could be unexpected holdups in the network, extra traffic. All week I've been watching the vitnews. No thefts reported from the system, so nobody's found my artwork. Abstain, man. Everything's workin'." I spoke boldly. I didn't have no choice.

Kilbee was fondling his vibrato. "You talk real big, 'Stebob. Maybe you think you're smarter than us cause you can fold a little crappy boxwork?"

"Ease off," said Chuy. He stared single-mindedly at the two maglev lines that led to the big loading dock behind the Mall. "Give it time."

"Yeah, sure." Kilbee turned to gaze tiredly out the window, resting his head against his closed fist and slumping in his seat.

I sat up fast. "Something's coming." Everyone forgot about everything else and sat up straight to look.

It was a container, ambulatin' smoothly according to program, heading toward the back of the loading dock. I tried to see past it but there didn't appear to be anyone following it on the track, or on the street nearby. I felt a hand squeezing my arm hard. Chuy, his eyes glittering.

We piled out of the truck and just watched while the container, neat as you please, slid down the elevated induction track and came to a stop exactly as I'd programmed it to. Kilbee came out of his trance long enough to give me a quick, totally unexpected hug. Then he was backing the truck around while the rest of us anxiously scanned the Mall's access street.

The container's module obediently responded to the come-hither call from the standard beacon in the truck cab and slid inside. Huong and I shut the rear door and away we went, the whole damn container snugged safely inside.

At the abandoned warehouse down in the old harbor industrial district we cracked that beautiful sucker. Chuy had picked a car destined for the Dai-Syntec Combine works up at Algodones. The container was crammed with

all kinds of good stuff; sense-screens, blank moto paks, expensive modulators.

When our private little fire sale was fully concluded and fenced two weeks later we gleaned about six hundred thousand, including an unexpected eleven thousand for the vacuumed container itself. Re-marked and calligraphed, with a brand-new identifying module, it was sent cruising surreptitiously south toward Salvador and a new life.

*Mi compadres* were more than a little spizzed, you know.

There was nothing about our abscond in the vits for three weeks. Then I found a small item in the Strip financial section, had a hard copy made, and showed it to the gang at Chuy's.

"Dai-Syntec Corporation today announced the disappearance . . . see, man, they don't say theft . . . of a container load of valuable componentry. Insurance adjusters are investigating, but the loss is believed due to box error." Box error, my ass, I half-shouted, and everyone had fine words, mostly obscene, for the investigators at Dai-Syntec.

I could imagine the consternation in Company Receiving when their container arrived . . . and there was nothing there. Their box screens would show the container, whose simple rectangular appearance and markings I had artfully duped in VR, right where it belonged on the delivery track. Instruments would dutifully register its arrival weight as six point two tons, including cargo. But when they'd go out to the unloading dock to look for it, there'd be *nada* there. The boxman would check his stats and visual and there'd be the container, big as life. Except there wasn't nothing in actual reality. Only in virtual reality. A ghost container. No wonder they were sayin' the loss was due to box error.

As soon as the real container had deviated from its original programming and split from its northbound train, my template had kicked in and subbed a virtual one in its space. All the way north, at all the checkpoints, monitors would've recorded the virtual substitute according to the eager feed from my art and indicated nothing amiss. Meanwhile our container had turned sharply south and wended its merry way to the Mall dock. If anyone had actually flown over the train as it was speeding north and run a real-time inspection they'd have seen a container-sized gap between a Simas mobile reservoir and one from China. The whole business wouldn't have worked in the Twentieth Cen, when a train consisted of a line of cars dragged along by a single energy source located at the front. But with each induction container individually powered, it worked just fine for us.

All the poor sucks at Dai-Syntec ended up with was a lot of virtual confusion.

We celebrated for a week, and then flattened. We had plenty of money, too much for Chuy to launder all at once, but nobody was hurting for kosh. We stayed smart, too. Nobody ran out and bought six cars an' twelve platinum chains. We had our fun, but quietly, even took a month in the sun at Cocos Annex; soaking up the UV, overwarming the SCUBRA fems in their tight diving suits, and cruising with the hammerheads.

Six months later we did it again, but this go-around only realized about a hundred fifty thou. Chuy hadn't picked such a good one this time. Amazing how fast we got spoiled. We didn't push it, though. Didn't want to risk making a pattern, or leaving a trail for some intuit to sniff out. So we waited another three months before hitting again, and this time we tried a completely different part of the yard.

Chuy like to spizz when we cracked that container. "Holy Virgin of Guadalupe!" I remember him hissing, half-chokin' on the exclamation. Huong and Kilbee didn't have a clue, but I did, and I didn't say a thing. Couldn't. But I know my eyes got big.

Huong dipped into the crate Chuy had popped and scooped up a handful of carefully bubble-packed cotton candy. "What is this stuff?"

"Superconducting composite fibers," Chuy told him. "They use this stuff to put together *big* boxes. The kind that run the phone companies and military hardware. It's all rare-earth doped under special conditions. You know what this shit costs, senwhore?"

Huong found out soon enough, as did the rest of us. We made a million and a half and this time you didn't have to search the vitwens to find out about the skrag. It was all over even the general broadcasts by the first of next week. You could smell the intuits the company hastily hired searching for a clue, a hint, anything. Even our tough-ass purchaser split for a *rapido* vacation down Sud-america way as soon as the deal was done-did, it having gotten too hot sudden-like in Ensenada to stick around. We hung at Chuy's place and savored all the noise.

This time I'd added a little filip to the riff, too (by now I was gettin' pretty cocky). Instead of putting in a VR-VW program that would remain locked in the box, I had it dissipate in the mid of the desert half way to Tucson. For days the vitwens was dense with shots of frustrated fed-crates swarming over a bare patch of cactus and sand out in the omphalos of noplace, where the container was supposedly plucked off the rail, scratching along beneath the maglev tracks, sweating and lookin' serious unhappy. The only thing they found was an eloping college couple from TSU and a couple of poker-faced chuckawallas. We laughed ourselves silly.

But the heat was getting *caliente* serious, and we talked about quitting. Chuy's made investments for us all, and we had plenty of kosh in the Isthmus to last each of us a lifetime. We discussed it and *babled* it for half a year, and finally decided to give the game one more spin.

Now that I look back at that time, I think it was for the kicks, you know? You get addicted to success. Theft is its own high, fiscal remunerations aside.

We checked the yard three times before we decided to go ahead, but any extra security had faded away in the months since our last visit. After the furor over the fiber filch had died down, things got pretty much back to normal. The ennuid didn't look like a feint. Chuy and I went in as usual, lookin' for something different this time. One more big skrag and we'd dump the Zenitrov and its damning peripherals and my clever artwork in the middle of the Golfo. One more.

We had to hide once to avoid a trio of Eyes, waiting half an hour until we were sure they were long gone. Then Chuy called me over to a cold car. I waited and watched while he studied the markings, the design.

"I don't know what the hell's in here," he whispered to me, "but it oughta be interesting. Says organics under cold."

"Shit, Chuy," I muttered, "we gonna steal a load of chickens?"

"C'mon, omber. Where's your curiosity? It's got the profound max security seal, which means it's full of valuable Bio. We can get rid of anything before it degrades." In the galvanic darkness of the yard, his eyes were shining. "Let's try skragging something a little different."

"What the hell." I got into the spirit a little. Chuy's enthusiasm was always infectious. "Let's do it." I unpacked the Zenitrov.

We greeted the diverted cargo in a low-level container rental facility south of the city. We never loaded one into a truck from the same place twice. Meanwhile its Virtual Dupe was racing north toward Greater LaLa. The destination alone indicated that the contents were valuable. Otherwise why ship through Ensenada instead of LaLa direct? I admit I was curious.

Thirty minutes later Kilbee backed the truck into the warehouse space he'd rented under a fictitious company name. Chuy had set it up, real legal and fancy. We even had stationery and holocd business cards, just for this one skrag. It was all part of the game.

We dropped the rear end of the truck and went to work on the container. A blast of cool air rushed out to envelop us when the door finally hummed aside. We went up and in. It was chilly in the container, but well above freezing.

The shipping crates were a light polypropylene mix, sealed instead of locked. We had to wait while Huong hunted up the right tools to open them. After all, we didn't want to damage our valuable cargo, whatever the hell it was.

The lid snapped off a bright red crate the size of a desk top. Beneath was another lid, transparent. Inside, nestled in a cushioning bed of puffy insulation, was what looked like a dead parrot.

"It's not a parrot," Chuy ran his modified netex over the embedded lading slip. "It's a blue and gold macaw. From Ecuador. Destination: Haute Animale Pet Emporium, Bel Air, LaLa."

"Well, shit," muttered Huong. "A frozen bird." Equally put off, I remembered what I'd said to Chuy back in the yard about skragging frozen chickens.

Chuy, however, didn't seem too disappointed. "First off, it ain't frozen. It's in an anabiotic state."

"Say what?" Kilbee made a face.

"Don't you guys never read nothing? They can ship anything alive this way and it gets to its destination unspoiled. They substitute a special kind of trehalose for the glucose in the body. That lets the cell membranes shut down safely. Then they chill it to near freezing, slow down the metabolic rate so that the body uses about twenty-five times less oxygen. Swap the trehalose for normal glucose, float

the body in warm water, give it an adrenaline boost and back it comes, squawking and screeching."

"Why not just ship 'em in cages?" Kilbee asked.

Chuy straightened. "Because a lot of 'em die along the way, and because they take up more room, and need attention, and make noise, and all those reasons make it a lot more likely Customs will find out about them."

"Customs?" Kilbee blinked, looked down at the brilliantly plumed quiescent bird. "You mean this parrot's an illegal?"

"Illegal as hell. I'd bet my right *buevo* this bird's a dance-spec." Chuy's expression was hard. He looked around the container's chilly interior. Suddenly I was colder, standing there. "Let's try another crate."

The next one proved to hold something called a capybara, which I think I heard about on a nature vit, and the one next to it half a dozen Amazonian green parrots. A special square box was full of trehalosed red piranhas, and the biggest one in the room held an eight-foot long black caiman, snoozing peacefully in its reinforced cold bed. We didn't know all the names, of course, but they were on the bills of lading embedded in each crate.

No wonder the polyprop crates had been heat-sealed.

The next crate we cracked contained a whole family of something called white-faced capuchins, but I think it was the margay kittens that finally got to me a little. Except for their exotic markings, they looked just like street cats. The lading bill said they were worth fifteen hundred apiece, wholesale to the buyer in LaLa.

We knew we could market the bioskrag with no problem. Magimal sellers would pay plenty for the endangered species, or danseps, eager to animorph them. Just north in San Juana you can buy and sell anything. The question was, did we want to?

"Each crate is self-contained and according to the instructions can last ten days outside the big container before the contents have to be revived," Chuy informed us, reading an inscription via his notex. "So nothing's gonna spoil if we ship it out by car." He eyed each of us in turn. "Anybody feel funny about this?"

"*Tot lam,*" muttered Huong. "That's swell. If we just forget it, they'll all die."

Kilbee nodded. "I *know* we can move this stuff. We sure can't send it back to Sudamerica, and if we notify Customs, they'll maybe trace it to us."

"Right. So we go ahead. This is gonna be *faz*. Don't you guys see it?" Chuy indicated the container's contents. "All this stuff's illegal business. So the people we've riffed it from, they can't go to the federales about it. This won't even make the vitnews. We're clean." Chuy rose, looked around. "Let's see what else we got before we close everything back up."

We found all kinds of things in that container, man. The 'mals some people will keep for pets. The big constrictor snakes gave me the twitch just to look at them, and Huong and Kilbee laughed at the look on my face. We found more kittens, and a year-old *el tigre*, and a lot more birds.

Chuy found something too. I saw him standing over the carton he'd just opened, staring down and saying

nothing. "Hey, Chuy," I said, "what you got there that's so kinky?"

Huong looked over from where he was helping Kilbee.

"Hey, maybe it's a movie star."

Kilbee made a vulgar noise. "Better, how about a *puta*-sicle?"

Surprisingly, Chuy didn't say anything. It was like he didn't hear us. He just beckoned, kinda. So we eyed each other wonderingly and walked over, and looked through the by now familiar transparent inner lid.

It was a baby.

I didn't say nothin'. Neither did Huong or Kilbee. I mean, man, what could you say? It was a little girl, buff naked, smooth and shiny an' clean as if she'd been polished. She lay in that white cushiony stuff all the crates were packed with and somehow that made it even more gross, you know? Like she wasn't no different from the parrots and lizards and monkeys. She lay on her back, with her head turned to her right and her little thumb plugging her mouth, just like she'd dropped off for a nap. There was some fuzz on her head, but not a whole lot.

I guessed she was maybe six months old. Huong thought as much as a year. Not that it mattered.

"Bastards," Chuy growled. I was surprised at his vehemence. I mean, it wasn't like it was his kid, or that of somebody he knew.

"I heard how this stuff goes down," Huong mumbled. "Poor women in Sudamerica have more kids than they know what to do with. So they sell 'em. Middle-men buy them up and smuggle them north and sell them in Veracruz and New York and LaLa and Nawlins."

"Let's check some other crates," I heard myself saying. Nobody spoke as we went to work.

There were twelve babies in all. Seven boys, five girls. The oldest was maybe a year and a half. The youngest . . . nobody wanted to deduce the age of the youngest.

We sat down on crates we were sure held only animals and caucused.

"We got to vacate this," Chuy was saying. "We got to let the federales know and just vacate."

Kilbee looked reluctant. "Shit, Chuy, we could move the animals first. I mean . . ."

"No!" Chuy wasn't fooling around. I mean, you could see it in his eyes, man. I didn't know why he was so mad. Nobody was like, festive, but he was more than that. Or less. "We turn it all over to the federales, let them follow up on it. I don't want any part of this, or the tribe behind it. We don't want to sift with them. You need money, Kilbee? I'll give you money."

Kilbee, big Kilbee, backed down fast. "No, Chuy, it ain't that."

"Then fuck it. Let's close this . . . let's close it all back up. We'll wait the container back to the yard." He looked at me. "You can do that, 'Stebo?' Not knowin' what else to do, I nodded. "Okay then. After, I'll tip the federales. None of you have to be involved." He hopped off his crate.

"Ice, infants!"

We all turned together. I gaped, but I couldn't get angry at myself. Nobody else had thought of it, either. Why should I be any different?



The omber sitting up in the open crate was ugly. It wasn't just the cold gel that dripped from his face and clothes. He was just plain ugly. He was about my size, skinny, but the automatic Ruzi he held made him look a lot bigger. We stood watching like four dumb kids trapped by the school bully as he climbed carefully out of the open crate and stood, a little shakily, his expression seeping mood. I knew just from looking at him that he'd as soon kill us as talk to us. In fact, it was clear that he wanted to kill us. But he was confused.

"What the fuck is this?" He peered past us, toward the dark recesses of the quiet warehouse. "You're not Misko. None of you is Misko."

"He couldn't come," Kilbee said hesitantly.

The man flicked the muzzle of his gun in Kilbee's direction and the big anglo flinched. A dark stain appeared on the front of his tropical silks, got bigger as I stared.

"Don't dick me, asshole. Where is this?"

Chuy spoke quietly. "Ensenada."

The man frowned, in control but obviously bemused. "Don't bullshit me."

"I'm not. You're in Ensenada."

"Something's wrong. I'm supposed to revive in Long Beach yard. Alarm must've gone off." He smiled: suddenly, unexpectedly, and unpleasantly. "Well, that's what I took the sleep for. Time to earn my kosh. First time for everything." He raised the gun. Next to me Kilbee made a whining noise.

"A meatrunner. A goddamn anabiosed meatrunner," Chuy snarled. He glared at us while I desperately tried to intuit what he was working. "First person cracks the container, built-in alarm program revives him. He checks to make sure the deal's done straight, flies back home. Anything looks menial-venal . . ."

"You're a swift little fucker, ain't you?" The meatrunner waved the gun, moving away from his crate and backing us toward the wall. If we'd sensed him when he'd first started to revive, maybe we could've slammed the lid back down on him in time. Maybe.

"You sell babies!" Chuy's eyes were bugged, and I could see he was losing it. I didn't know why, but that wasn't my preeminent concern of the moment.

"Shit, I don't sell nothing," the man retorted. "I just do what I'm told, I convoy, I pick up the payment and take it home. That's my job. That, and to make sure everything goes down straight. Ensenada, huh? That's a problem, but we got people here. I can weld things." Somehow I didn't think he was gonna be subtle about repairing our presence.

"What about their mothers?" Chuy persisted. I eyed him uncertainly. Why was he going on about it? We were all dead anyway. The guy was clinching a Ruzi, two thousand rounds a minute, full magazine. We were cheese.

"That's not my business. Buy 'em, steal 'em; I don't give a crap. I do my job." He gestured with the Ruzi. "It's all meat to me. Like you."

"What if one of them was your kid?" Chuy continued, taking a step forward. I winced, but the gun didn't go off. "Stuffed full of synthesized sugar and chilled down like a microwave dinner?"

"Don't got any kids. Don't got a daily woman. Don't want neither." He wiped liquefying insulating gel from his face. "Think I'd take a run like this if I did?" Gel dripped off his forehead into one eye and he rubbed at it.

Before anybody could say anything, Chuy charged.

The Ruzi went off. In the confines of the induction container it sounded like Chinese new year in Frisco. I saw that on a docuivit once. Kilbee screamed and bolted. *Cristo*, we all did, just because Chuy chose to freak didn't mean the rest of us had lost it. Slugs ricocheted all around us as we spilled out the open back of the container.

Kilbee got one in the ass. He bawled like a kid. Huong had one part his short black hair, leaving a nice red trail behind it. That's how the federales caught them; by tracking the essence. We all went different ways, running like wildmen from the warehouse. Since I wasn't hit and didn't leave no trail, I was the one who made it to the car and ripped out of there. I was sorry for Huong and Kilbee, but hell, I didn't know how had they'd been shot or how long it would've taken 'em to make it to the parking lot.

I didn't go to my codo. Lita was sleeping at her place but I woke her *prontissimo*, told her what had happened. At that time I didn't know that Huong and Kilbee had been picked up, and I didn't care. At a time like that you don't hang around waiting for the door to buzz. It might not be your amigos.

We had a prearranged place to rendez, down in the Isthmus. I left my *madre* and brother and sister a terse note, told them I'd be in touch soon as I got a chance. Then I went after Lita. She hesitated, but she came with me. See, I'd seen a lot that night, and all of a sudden having a family and a real *esposa* and some kids and settling down somewhere peaceable and quiet far, far away from meatrunners and Ruzis sounded like a pretty sensible idea. After she got through kissing me (ee-ha: salsa!) it didn't take her long to pack. She didn't have no job to quit no more. I'd been taking care of her since our first big success. As we were taking a robocab to the airport I looked up from where I was all squeezed down on the floorboards an' asked her to marry me. She didn't have time to think about it, which is maybe why she said yes. I don't care why, just that she did.

I didn't relax until we landed in Gatun City and took the boat out to the island. I waited there, calypsoing the dish all over the Clarke belt, monitoring the news vits. It was all there two days later. Not big stuff. I saw that they'd picked up Huong and Kilbee, and the blood placed them at the warehouse. *Mi compadres*, sweet little loco senhores that they are, didn't implicate me, though. They said it was all Chuy's idea, Chuy's plan, Chuy's work. That left me virgin and in the clear.

'Cause Chuy was dead.

Six slugs. None through vital organs, he just bled to death before the parameds arrived. When the old warehouse night watchman heard the Ruzi go off he naturally called the federales first. The meatrunner was dead too, Chuy's malachite-shafted little vibroblade stuck clean through his throat. I always thought that was a fem's weapon. Guess I was wrong. Sorry, omher. There was blood everywhere, which the news vit only hinted at.

Still, I wasn't going back. Too chancy. I had plenty of money. So did Kilbee and Huong, though it didn't look like they'd be able to get at it for eight years. That's what the legals hit 'em with. They blamed everything on Chuy, and the legals couldn't prove otherwise, but they could sure stick 'em for skraggin' the container. Maybe Kilbee's rich folks could've got him out sooner, but they washed their hands of him. Figures.

Only thing that didn't figure was Chuy rushing that guy. It was a *lunatico*, stupid move, which is probably the only reason he was able to get in close with his vibra- to before he was cut down. I told Lita about it, and she couldn't figure out why he did it neither.

I found out a year later, when I went roundabout to tell his *madre* how sorry I was. Took a long circuitous route to get an answer back to me, too, which is how I intended it.

Chuy'd had a little sister. All black hair an' bright eyes. He doted on her, lived for her. One day when he was seven and she was four, she wafted. Just vanished off the damn street, in the mid of the day. Nohody saw nothin'. They never found her. No body, nothing. She just evaporated. Maybe she was abused and dumped, maybe she just wandered away and fell off a dock into the bay and the current carried her south, or the sharks got her. Maybe she was skragged, doped, shipped north, and sold. No body ever found out. It stuck Chuy real deep, even deeper than it did the mother. Ahyssal visceral, like. Things like that, they never go way, never disappear. They're like mental malaria: just when you think you got it cured, you end up puke sick an' flat on your back all over again.

You think about that, and the twelve trehalosed habies,

and you'll understand. Chuy didn't see a dozen babies in that skragged container: he saw twelve wailing *mama-cittas* somewhere in Sudamerica. Maybe the deals were all sad but clean, maybe they all did it voluntarily and were glad of the money. But maybe one or two weren't bought. Maybe they were just acquired, like. Abducted, snatched off the streets, out of a carriage or papoose pack. Nobody ever know that, either.

*Mierde*, I felt sorry for the babies *and* the kittens.

They couldn't trace nothing to me 'cause the Zenitrov had been left in Chuy's car, and when I wafted I took it with me to Panama. Gave me something to do, play around with. No more yard rifling, though. No more shamming with VR-VW simulations. But I practiced plenty. I'm an artist, you know?

It'd be nice to share memories and stories and company with Huong and Krying Kilbee. That's what I call him these days, and I know he wouldn't mind it 'cause we're both BTS, now an' perpetual. Of course I can't do that 'cause they're up in federal penitentiary in Chihuahua, paying their debt to society. They can't get out of that stone-cold place because they're tracked and watched an' looked after by the most sophisticated automatic antisoc monitoring instrumentation the Namerican penal system can devise.

They couldn't possibly be down here with me and Lita, swimming and diving off our little private island, bibulatin' beer and siestaing in the sun and trouhling the local *senoritas*. They have to serve their time, and omher, that's just what they're doing.

Virtually all of it. ♦



Harv makes the mistake of driving while enjoying "Ye Olde Book of Spells" on tape.

# The Burial Society

Thomas M. Disch

Somehow it had not occurred to Robin Santiago until now, at the age of 44, that he was going to die. He was. That was an absolute certainty. There was a tombstone in his future, an epitaph, an obituary. Death. There it was, so why hadn't he seen it till now? It was as visible, as hard to overlook, as a pyramid in the middle of the desert. Once you saw it you couldn't really see anything else.

Robin came to this awareness, which sooner or later everyone is bound to come to, walking along the beach at Ipanema at 4 A.M. on a Sunday morning, returning to his condo from a gig at the club where he worked as a mixer and deejay. He was feeling both elevated and wasted, not for any extraneous psychochemical reasons, but as a natural result of the samba as a way of life. It was the way he usually felt on this beach at this hour, a little world-weary, a little tristful, but scarcely morbid. There was only enough moonlight to be able to make out the silhouettes of surfers far out on the dappled water. Robin walked barefoot at the ocean's tepid edge, where the sand was firmest and the water would froth up over his toes. Farther up the beach, people slept on the sand, most of them, like Robin, wearing only bikinis, a



Illustration by Jill Bauman

costume permitted by both the weather and Ipanema's muggers, a goodly proportion of whom were probably laid out right there before him, inert.

A flock of pigeons settling down to roost on a pediment or an electric line will space themselves out, one from another, with almost mathematical precision, and derelicts sleeping on beaches will do the same thing. Robin had walked home from work along this same stretch of beach hundreds of times, had observed this same phenomenon each time (in balmy weather), but it had never before occurred to him, as it did now, that the sleepers on the beach, had they been hurried beneath the sand, would have been ordered, in a geometrical sense, very much as they might have been in an old-fashioned cemetery of the sort his grandparents had been buried in, back when. The same sense of personal space would have been preserved below ground as above.

Then he thought of how often, rather than walk all the way back home, he had spent the night on the beach himself, so that on those occasions he would have been one of those whom he'd just buried in his own imagination.

And suddenly death was real. Suddenly the whole beach was a cemetery.

"Why didn't I ever realize?" he asked of his drug counselor at their next session together. "It's not as though it's any kind of secret. I'm going to die. My life will end. You'll be here and I won't. God damn."

"I might die first," his drug counselor pointed out.

"Yeah. But I've been assuming *everyone* would die first."

"You've been in denial. It's not that unusual, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Denial is a useful psychological tool when the alternative is despair."

"Is that the alternative?" Robin mused, not really expecting an answer.

"No, there are lots of alternatives. Drink, drugs, sex, sports. You're a soccer fan, aren't you? Maybe Brazil will win the World Cup this year. How about that?"

Robin could only sigh.

His counselor thought for a while. "Or you could face the problem head-on. You could join a hurl society."

Robin shook his head.

"You could. Why not? You think you're too young? More than half the people in this country are dead before they get to be your age. You've already got two grandchildren, if I remember correctly."

"Four. And I don't *feel* that old. Back just half a century ago there were movie stars who were at the height of their careers when they were my age. How old was Cary Grant when he made *North by Northwest*? More than forty-four, I'll bet. Forty-four used to be young."

"Not any more, Robin," his drug counselor said, shaking his head.

And that head itself, with the pale scalp visible through its sparse veil of frizzy hair, the souvenir of his chemotherapy, was a better persuader than anything he could say. The guy wasn't 25 yet, and he would almost certainly not live to see 30. Of course, his was a profession that tended to attract those with poor actuarial prospects. They could satisfy their pharmaceutical requirements at rock bottom prices.

"I'll tell you what, Robin. I'll write you up a prescription for credulity. It won't get rid of your bad feelings, but sometimes it alters them in a way that's useful. They become more interesting, and you can start dealing with them. Okay?"

"I was actually thinking more along the lines of valium."

"No. For you, right now, that would be a bad idea.

Credulity, and—" He reached behind him to a rack of pamphlets, plucked one, and handed it to Robin. "Read this. Maybe it'll help."

The title of the pamphlet, in blocky blue letters on a field of mustard yellow, was *Death, Where Is Thy Sting?*

When he got home he stuck the pamphlet to the refrigerator door with a magnet, ate some leftover sushi the caterer at the club had given him to take home, and went down to the lobby when the guard buzzed and asked Robin to spell him for a coffee break. When the guard returned, Robin noticed something he might have noticed any other time he'd taken over the door for this same guard (whose name was either Jesus or Luiz; he got the two daytime guards confused): a cherry-red ear-pin in the form of a skull. The eye sockets and nose cavity of the skull were lime green, and the combination—crrise and lime—indicated that the guard came from the nearby favela of Salgueiro. Robin had somehow assimilated that fact without thinking about it. The color codes of the city's rival slums were nearly as basic to a Carloca's consciousness as noticing whether people were armed or if they were sexually available and on what terms. But what Robin hadn't taken in, or thought about, was the fact that Jesus (or Luiz) declared his allegiance to Salgueiro with a skull. Which led him to ask:

"Are you a member of a hurl society?"

"Yes," the guard replied, reaching under his jacket to stroke his shoulder holster nervously. That was all: yes.

"Is it . . . uh . . . do you . . ."

"I cannot talk about it, Sr. Santiago. It is secret. Very dark."

He crossed himself slowly and significantly, as though Robin were an evil spirit whose attention must be averted.

"Well, you weren't always a member, were you? How did you come to join? Did someone approach you? Is there an office people go to?"

The guard only furrowed his brow and touched the pin in his ear significantly.

"Well, sorry," Robin said, in a tone of appeasement. "I didn't mean to pry."

"We're all going to die, Sr. Santiago. There's no escaping that."

"No, of course not. You're right there."

"Some sooner than others."

"True."

By this time he'd retreated into the elevator. He pressed his floor, 11, and as the doors squeezed shut, he thought of how a guillotine worked on a similar principle. When he was embarrassed he often thought of guillotines, or other forms of capital punishment, and few things are more embarrassing than to be snubbed by a seventeen-year-old social inferior, who slept in the basement and took his baths in the atrium fountain. Still, you had to bear in mind,

at such moments of resentment, that guards are in a high-risk profession, and if they expected a certain kind of deference and large tips at Christmas, that was only fair, and it certainly beat having to pay them a salary.

Money was a funny thing. The more of it Robin earned the clearer this became. There were so many things money just couldn't buy: love, fresh air, sunlight, food, and a roof over one's head. Those things were God-given or you networked to get them. What money could buy was usually some kind of symbolic and/or ephemeral benefit: sex, drugs, a box at the opera, some new skin, or this entirely new possibility, a membership in a burial society.

He had friends who'd joined, but he couldn't really ask them about it, because after they'd joined they'd gradually dropped out of sight. He couldn't tell if it had been their fault or his or, indeed, if it was culpable. Anyhow, as Jesus or Luiz had reminded him, it was something you weren't supposed to talk about, just the way you didn't ask people about their diseases. People got sick, and then either they got well again or they got still sicker as their immune systems self-destructed, and there wasn't much that medicine could do about it, so it was best not to dwell on the subject and, therefore, polite not to discuss it.

There was the pamphlet he'd been given, but it mostly dealt in safe generalities, such as, "Throughout recorded history, mankind has dealt with the specter of Death by creating counter-worlds and afterlives in which Death has no dominion. These worlds, and these lives, are still open for exploration. They are, in the words of William Shakespeare, an 'undiscovered country,' perhaps the last one left." The pamphlet was issued by Elysio Brasilienses, a nonprofit organization that claimed to have no ties with any organized religion, while respecting the truth and wisdom of all of them, from Catholicism to Candomblé.

On the last page of the pamphlet there was an 800 number to call for more information. Robin dialed it, and got a recorded message: "The life you have been leading up to now is only the shadow of the life to come." Which, even if it was true, was not much practical help.

That was when he called up Candelaria Myers, one of the friends from days of yore. More accurately, the wife of one of those friends, since the actual friend, Wayne Myers, had died four years ago, as Robin's tickler file reminded him when he'd tried to reach Wayne by his universal paging number.

"Robin Santiago," Candelaria said, in a tone of polite puzzlement. "Oh, yes, I remember now. You and Wayne played handball together. How nice of you to call."

Robin was completely up front about the reason he'd phoned, explaining that his drug counselor had suggested that he needed to join a burial society and that he'd hoped that Wayne, or rather Candelaria, might be able to point him in the right direction.

"This is so amazing," Candelaria marveled. "That you should think to call at exactly this moment. It can't be an accident."

"How is that?" Robin asked.

"Because I was just going to go out to the necropolis to talk with Wayne tomorrow. And I haven't actually taken the trouble to go out there for a few months. It takes a

while to get there even at off-peak hours. Would you like to come with me? I've got a free pass."

That wasn't what Robin had had in mind, but he was off work and had no other plans for the day, so what the hell. Wayne's necropolis was located in what had been the favela of Earthday, one of the last to be built (it sprang up in the mid-90s) and the first to be depopulated during the die-back. The few people who still lived there served as caretakers for the necropolis. The fact that it was such a long bicycle ride from the center of Rio had told against Earthday commercially. There were now necropolises within a half hour's ride from Ipanema and Copacabana, and these were, naturally, more fashionable and pricier. To judge by the look of the other visitors, as they approached the line at the security gate, Earthday wasn't significantly more chic than Sanguiero, in which Jesus or Luiz had his membership. However, in death as in life, appearances can be deceiving, and some of the most prestigious burial societies were also the funkiest. The samba schools were the same: rich and poor were all mixed into the same stew like meat and beans.

While they waited in the vestibule for their security clearance, a taped message welcomed them to Earthday and told them the story of Dona Eurides, a *candoble* saint and healer who'd died during the Great Plague of Aught-Eight and begun shortly thereafter to communicate, on the telephone, with her daughter, Dona Celestina, telling her to turn her home on the summit of Earthday into a shrine to Eurides's patron, the god Omolu. Dona Eurides gave elaborate directions for the decoration of the shrine. There was to be a bed with satin sheets, a glass wardrobe in which her most beautiful samba costumes would be exhibited, and a lifesize statue of Yemanjá, goddess of the ocean and Omolu's mother. The walls, ceiling, and floor were to be encrusted with seashells painted in Earthday's colors, coral and canary yellow, and there was to be a television that would be turned on each day at the hour of Dona Eurides's favorite program, *My Heart Is Eternal-ly Yours*.

The popular response to Dona Eurides's appeal, as communicated through her daughter, was enormous. Contributions poured in, and the shrine that was built to house her ashes became the Mecca of visitors from all over the city, drawn there by the possibility of being able to talk directly to Dona Eurides on the pay phones surrounding the shrine. You could peek in through the hermetically sealed windows and see the TV entertaining the spirit of Dona Eurides in death as in life. There, on the little end table beside the statue of Yemanjá, was a glass of wine and, sometimes, a freshly lighted cigarette, its smoke rising up through the still air in an unwavering vertical plume.

As soon as they saw it, and had talked with Dona Eurides over the phone, everyone wanted to be buried in just the same way. And since the property values of the less developed favelas had plummeted because of the die-back, it was possible to snap up a shanty on Earthday, that was suitable for conversion, for not much more than the price of a traditional cemetery plot. Cemeteries, in any case, were running out of room and getting, some of them, a little noxious. Dona Eurides assured those who would lis-

ten that cremation was no impediment to a full afterlife and that establishing a communication base, such as her shrine, where friends and relatives might come to get in touch, was a much wiser investment than embalming, cemetery plots, and suchlike. Soon the dead of Earthday outnumbered the living.

Robin listened to all this ancient history with the same fractional attention he would have given to the stock market reports on the evening news. The rest of his attention was devoted to Candelaria's extraordinary breasts—plump, houncy movie-star breasts that hung in the bodice of her tightly fitted dress like melons growing in a net. When she had been Wayne's wife, Candelaria's breasts had not seemed so considerable. Had she had implants? They were a lovely color, tanned to a deep mulatto brown but revealing, at the cleavage, a trace of their original sunless pallor. Robin knew that suntans so deep were dangerous and no longer chic, but an exception had to be made for Candelaria's breasts.

He wondered about her nipples: their size, their color, their texture and resiliency.

"I wish you wouldn't stare."

"Was I staring? I'm sorry—my mind was off somewhere else entirely. It's incredible about that Dona Eurides."

"Mm." Candelaria tilted herself forward, repositioning the melons in their nets. "Did you see on the news, someone said she's still alive? That her death was all a fake?"

"Why would she do that?"

"For the money. That's what they said. But I don't believe it. I mean, I've talked to her. On the phone. People will say anything if they can be on TV. Right?"

"I suppose."

"I know. What it is, there are people who can't live by spiritual principles. They've got to deny everything. Including the afterlife. Especially the afterlife. It's sad, in a way. You've got to feel sorry for them. But it's no excuse for broadcasting ideas like that in public. There's some people who don't have such strong faith. They could be swayed. They could be upset."

"If I were you, I just wouldn't pay attention to such stories."

"You're right," Candelaria said, nodding vigorously. "You're completely right." Her breasts concurred.

Once they'd been cleared and gone through the gate, it was a long climb to Wayne's mausoleum, up a zigzagging switchback alley lined on each side with the remodeled residences of the dead. Each one was designed to reflect the personality of the deceased. For instance, the tomb of Julinho and Isabel Arruda was furnished as a playroom where a variety of dolls and stuffed animals lounged about awaiting the return of the absent children, whose photographs, preserved under plexiglass, were displayed on the memorial tablet fixed to the door of the tomb. All the mausolea offered a similar photographic memorial, although in some cases the sealant had been penetrated and the photograph showed signs of mildew. But if the corroded face wasn't that of a personal friend, such signs of time's relentless passage—the ruts of the wheels in the road, so to speak—could be seen as picturesque in a melancholy way, like the ivy covering a ruin.

Other tomb interiors looked to have been created by interior decorators, as indeed they had been, for the growing popularity of the necropolises had given rise to an entirely new profession, that of the memorial designer. Some of these designers favored an old-fashioned approach, fashioning interiors that resembled, as much as possible, the sepulchers and crypts of tradition, with lots of marble and stone angels and funerary urns, but the great majority exerted their talent to give the illusion of life continuing unchanged after the inconvenience of death. What had been valued on this side of the great divide would presumably be valued hereafter, and provision was made accordingly. Alessandro Almaviva, who was born in 1986 and died in 2033, had left behind a memorial wine cellar, or at least a very convincing simulation of one. Dona Anastacia King, born 1972, died 2035, the beloved wife of Raimundo, offered passersby an opportunity to play canasta with her. Robin made the mistake of wondering aloud whether it was always Anastacia who played the hands she was dealt, or whether she might sometimes delegate this task to the computer that shuffled and dealt the cards.

Candelaria replied with a single withering look, crimping her otherwise full lips into a pucker of indignation. When she puckered, dimples appeared in her cheeks.

"There is a computer," Candelaria allowed, "but it's just there to help. It's like a telephone line. When you talk to Wayne you'll understand. He hasn't changed that much. The way he thinks, his sense of humor. A computer couldn't do that."

"But before he died—"

"Passed over," Candelaria corrected.

"Before he passed over, wasn't there some kind of test he took, a questionnaire to fill out?"

"Oh, yes, there's an interview. You're in this little cubbyhole and they ask you different dumb questions. What's your favorite color? What did you think of Xuxa when she was on TV? Did your mother ever get you really angry? Stuff like that."

Robin asked no more awkward questions and tried to avoid remarks that would have sounded skeptical. You never accomplished anything trying to argue with people's religious beliefs. If someone thought he was sexist because he was a Scorpio, why not let him think so? If Candelaria thought the amulet she wore on her left ankle would placate Exu, where was the harm in that? Exu was a pretty priapic deity ("devil" might come closer to the mark), and Candelaria was a morsel to melt in his mouth, so if she wanted to placate anyone, Exu was the right target.

If he'd taken the credulin his counselor had prescribed for him, none of these misgivings would have arisen like so much mental mist to obscure his direct experience of Earthday. Which was, by almost any reckoning except strict rationality, a kind of utopia, a doll's house where all dolls were equal and everyone was having a nice time, albeit invisibly. Don't think, he advised himself. Feel it on your skin.

"There it is," Candelaria announced, as the switchback path made a sharp turn and became a steep flight of stairs up through a dark canyon of tenements only five feet apart. "It's the one with the light burning in the window."

It glowed from a second-story window, a Christmasy wreath of colored bulbs, which would have been switched on (Robin figured), along with the tomb's other utilities, while they were being cleared through security. Candelaria opened the rust-tinged padlock on the downstairs door with an old-fashioned steel key, and Robin followed her up a flight of crumbly concrete stairs to a second-story corridor so narrow that a larger-hipped woman would have had to turn sideways. Candelaria eased through like a barge progressing along the canal it was built for, the lush magenta blooms of her dress almost but not quite brushing the concrete blocks on either side.

They entered Wayne's tomb, and Wayne's voice greeted them cheerily: "Candelaria, baby, good to see you! Robin, hey man, where you *been*? You're looking good, both of you. Come on in, make yourself at home. This is really great."

"Hi, Wayne," said Candelaria, with a sideways glance at Robin that said, *What did I tell you?*

"Hi, Wayne," Robin echoed, with the twinge of the resentment he got whenever a singer would try to coerce an unenthusiastic audience to clap along with his song.

But there was also a twinge of sheer uncanniness. Even though he didn't believe it was Wayne he was talking to, even though he was sure that the computer was simply offering a reconstituted version of Wayne's recorded voice, it *sounded* like Wayne.

"I'll bet you're feeling spooked," Wayne said, with a chuckle. "That was my first reaction coming here. And I wasn't even visiting a friend. And maybe a little skeptical, too, huh? It's only natural. Just relax, you'll get used to it. Hey, Candy-bar, I love that dress. Oh, my, yes."

Candelaria blushed.

Wayne chuckled again. "I think maybe she doesn't like me using her nickname in front of someone else. But Robin's no stranger. He must've heard me call you Candy-bar before. Right, Robin?"

"I'm just not used to visiting here with anyone else, Wayne. You know that." Candelaria spoke in a low, placatory voice and laid her hand reassuringly on a polo shirt draped over the back of a delapidated recliner: Wayne's favorite shirt, and his favorite chair.

"But it's not like he's catching us *in flagrante delicto*," Wayne replied, with his old habit of saying aloud what other people would only think. "I wish he was, I wish that were still possible. In some ways, baby, the afterlife is not pure heaven. In some ways it is like standing in the longest fucking line you ever stood in in your life. Like, for getting your driver's license. But the other side of the coin is, there's no hurry. I've got all eternity, and the weather's always perfect. How's the weather there?"

"Lovely," said Candelaria.

"A little steamy," said Robin at the same time.

"My sister's over here now, had you heard that?"

"I heard," said Candelaria.

Robin said, "I didn't know you had a sister."

"Mm-hm. Back in Texas. She kept saying she was going to come visit Rio, but she never made it. She's still a little bitter about the virus. Like, what did I do to deserve this. She can't accept that it isn't her *fault* that she's dead. But

that's Marilyn for you. She always needed a reason for everything. Anyhow, she says hello. She also asked me to point out that the jade plant needs watering. I wouldn't have noticed myself, but you know Marilyn, she's a fanatic about cats and houseplants."

Candelaria went to the window and probed the soil of the potted jade plant on the sill. "Oh, dear, she's right—the soil is turning to *dust*. And I didn't think to bring water. Robin, I won't be two minutes. There's a tap not far from here. You stay and talk with Wayne, okay? I'm sure you'll have plenty to reminisce about." She rummaged through a storage carton in the corner of the tomb and produced an empty Fanta Orange liter bottle, and left promising, "Maybe *three* minutes at the very most."

"That was just an excuse to get rid of her," Wayne said the moment she had left. "I could care less about the jade plant, and as for Marilyn, she's a typical gringo. She thinks when someone dies you just plant them and forget them. She took one look at Earthday in general and at my own little pigeonhole here, and started making snide remarks. Like she'd caught me wearing the wrong fucking tie. I'll tell you, Robin, you may consider *me* a Yankee imperialist exploiter, and I *did* work for a major multinational, but compared to Marilyn I'm as Brazilian as *umbanda*."

The illusion that it was Wayne he was listening to was so potent, and so pleasurable, that Robin really wished he could have been taken in. It would have been so nice to believe.

"The thing with Marilyn is," Wayne went on, "nothing's good enough. So maybe my tomb's a little cheesy, but Marilyn's not satisfied with the afterlife. Across the board. She thought the music, the architecture, everything would be *better*. Nothing is heavenly enough for her. Myself, I always liked it here, so the fact that there isn't that much difference is okay with me."

He fell silent for a moment, and then resumed in a more thoughtful tone of voice: "I miss the sex, though. I really do miss the sex."

Robin had to ask. "There's no sex up there?"

"Oh, there is, in a way. But it's not the same. It's not *physical*. That makes a difference."

"It's pose it would."

"Drugs, on the other hand, I'm just as happy to do without. Not that they can't be useful—in *your* situation." Another pause, and then, in a new persona: "I know where Candy-bar keeps her stash. It's in a Cafe Iguacu tin in the box she dug the bottle out of. Credulin. If you're interested."

Robin found the tin where Wayne said it would be. He was tempted and, as he usually did with temptation, he succumbed. But even as he was succumbing, he tried to deal rationally with the question of who, exactly, had offered the temptation, and why. He ruled out Wayne, as nonexistent.

The computer that was simulating Wayne's voice? But how would the computer know where Candelaria kept her supply of pills?

Candelaria herself? Was this some indirect way of inviting him to help himself to the beer in the icebox? A new twist on an ordinary social amenity? If so, how was he to interpret the next curve Wayne threw at him? Which was:

"So what are your feelings towards Candy-bar, amigo? If you care to express them."

"Feelings?" Robin echoed, flustered.

"Such as: affection, longing, desire, lust."

If he'd been honest, Rohin would have had to check (e), All of the above. Instead, he became indignant, which seemed safer. "Wayne, you're asking me do I feel lust for your wife?"

"Whereas you think I should take it for granted? You'd have a point there. I mean, she hasn't lost any of her bloom that I can see since the time you tried to make a pass at her in the Sambadrome, when was it, six years ago?"

Okay, Rohin told himself, figure: Only Candelaria would have known about that very fleeting moment. A kiss, a grope, a second kiss that said, "I'm sorry, I'd like to, but I can't." So if only she knew it, then this message, ostensibly from the beyond, had to be from Candelaria herself. Maybe at this very moment she was on the phone, directing what Wayne was saying like a ventriloquist controlling his dummy. So, thinking himself a sly fox, Robin's reply to Wayne was: "No, Wayne, what I feel for Candelaria is none of those things. I'm in love with her, pure and simple."

"You amaze me," said Wayne.

He'd amazed himself, because, having forgotten the credulity in his system, he discovered that what he'd said was true. He *was* in love with Candelaria. She was the center of his existence. He wanted to marry her or, at the very least, to have sex with her the minute she came back with the water for the jade plant. To pluck the melons from their nets. To hoard the barge. To plunder her stash. To samha with her through eternity.

"Love is always amazing," Rohin countered. "What's the matter, are you jealous?"

"No . . . no . . . not really. But I would ask you, as a personal favor, not to get carried away here in my sepulcher. There is a poem I had to memorize back in my college days that sums up my feelings on the subject:

*The grave's a fine and private place,*

*But none I think do there embrace."*

"Probably back when the poem was written they didn't make graves big enough to embrace in. But let me ask you a question, Wayne."

"Shoot."

"Do you think that's what Candelaria had in mind when she invited me here?"

"Robin, I'm not a mind reader."

"Well, has she ever asked anyone else here like this? Because it is, as you've pointed out, a fine and private place."

"Rohin, you're asking me to spy on my own wife's sexual activities."

"You're her husband, you're entitled to." When there was no response from Wayne for some time, he prompted: "Well?"

But there was not to be a reply, for Wayne had, in effect, hung up.

Not much later Candelaria returned with a supply of water for the jade plant—and with Sr. Jorge Vicente Vargas, who was an officer of the Earthday Right Society and an old, dear friend both to her and to Wayne. She'd met Sr. Vargas, Candelaria explained, while waiting in

line at the water tap, and he'd insisted on coming back with her to the tomb to meet Rohin and to say hello to Wayne.

"So, how did you come to know Wayne?" Robin asked Sr. Vargas, shifting gears from the impassioned declaration that had been on the tip of his tongue to polite chitchat.

"By visiting with him," Sr. Vargas answered with a benign twinkle. He was a robustly corpulent man with a noble brow, a mane of distinguished white hair, and intensely garlicky breath.

"You met him . . . here in Earthday?"

Sr. Vargas nodded. "But I do not value his acquaintance any the less for that. I would guess that at this point I must have as many friends who've passed to the other side as I do among those still tethered to the flesh. They are, after all—what is the expression?—the Great Majority. As we say here, better late than never."

"Wayne," Candelaria said brightly, "you'll never guess who I saw with your cousin Orlando waiting in line at Pathmark."

When there proved to be no reply from Wayne, Rohin explained: "I think I said something to annoy him. Anyhow, he kind of faded away. Sorry."

"Oh, it's not your fault. He gets into moods like that, he always did. Do you know what I think it is? Jealousy! No, don't laugh. Wayne can be jealous for no reason at all. He sees me with another man and suddenly he's Othello and I'm what's-her-name. It's ridiculous. But I guess I should try to talk to him. I mean, just the two of us, if that's okay?"

"Oh, sure, I'll wait downstairs."

"Oh, there's no need for you to do that," Sr. Vargas said to Robin. "My wife's tomb is not far from here. I would be honored if you would come there and make her acquaintance. Sra. Myers can join us after she has had time to be with her beloved spouse. Would that be agreeable to you, Candelaria?"

Candelaria nodded, and so Robin, smarting with the first stings of Love's arrow, was led away from his beloved and taken to the tomb of Sra. Tiffany Vargas, a woman who, on the evidence of the photograph that hung above the microwave oven within her tomb, had shared her widower's appetite for the pleasures of the table. Indeed, even here provision had been made for the couple's culinary needs, and Sr. Vargas insisted that Robin should share a small repast of manioc bread and mango jelly with himself and Dona Tiffany.

While they ate, Dona Tiffany asked a number of not very subtle questions about Robin's belief in and experience of the afterlife, and when she found that he was not a member of any other burial society, she grew quite enthusiastic over the idea that he might take out a membership in Earthday and began to cite its many competitive advantages with respect both to cost and the amenities that were provided. Dona Tiffany's style of advocacy was wheedling nearly to the point of nagging, and Sr. Vargas would interrupt from time to time, as spouses tend to do in such situations, to remind his deceased wife that Robin might have more pressing concerns than the purchase or the adornment (for Dona Tiffany knew a decorator she



was sure would exactly suit Robin's requirements) of Robin's tomb.

At last Candelaria came to the rescue, but with more denizens of Earthday in tow—two little girls in frilly holiday dresses, Diva and Corazon, whose mother had left them in Candelaria's charge while she'd gone shopping at the Earthday mall. Dona Tiffany made a great fuss over the two girls, who responded with the polite dread so many children evince in the presence of the very old. In the case of Dona Tiffany they were spared having to kiss actual withered living lips, but when they were urged to share in the little repast of manioc bread and mango jelly, they rejected the idea with mounds of muted horror.

"Do you think," Robin whispered to Candelaria, while Dona Tiffany cooed over the children, "that I could talk with you a moment?" He nodded toward the door of the tomb. "Alone?"

"I don't think I ought to leave the children alone with Tiffany," Candelaria whispered. "This is their first visit to Earthday. They're a little nervous about talking with the departed. But if it's about Wayne, that's all cleared up. He said he wanted to apologize to you, but he wouldn't say for what. He said you'd know. And he also said he hoped you'd come back again, when he was feeling better."

"I thought everyone always felt great once they were in heaven."

Candelaria shook her head. "No, he gets into moods. And it isn't heaven exactly, where they are. It's more like a vacation resort. Or an airport lounge. I gather it can get pretty crowded. And noisy. Sometimes he says he can't hear himself think with all the others around him, like in a noisy restaurant. That's why he likes to hang around his tomb a lot. It's like home for him. I guess you could say it *is* his home, now. I feel sorry for him, and I try to get out here as much as I can, but it is quite a ride. So that's why I appreciated your coming out here with me."

"Oh, Candelaria," Robin said fervently, "any time you want company, believe me, I'd be happy to come along. It's my pleasure."

She gave his hand a little squeeze of thanks. "That's nice of you. And I know it means a lot to Wayne, too."

\* \* \*

And that was how it came about, after Candelaria had exhausted her supply of free passes, that Robin became a member of the Earthday Burial Society. It was not so much a concern for his own posthumous needs that led him to invest in a tomb site around the corner from Wayne's but wanting to have somewhere he could get together with Candelaria away from her husband's hovering presence. But then, gradually, his tomb seemed to take on a life of its own. It had to be painted, and then, if he wanted to get in touch with any of Earthday's nonliving denizens, he had to install optical fiber cable. He got a futon, a TV, a carpet to mask the slivery plywood of the floor. He hung up his college diploma and pictures of his various offspring and grand-offspring. Each of these decisions, of course, required Candelaria's inputs and approval.

Love, however, in any active erotic sense, had to be put on hold. It wasn't that Candelaria herself was unwilling. The problem was Wayne. In principle Wayne could

accept the idea that Candelaria was a creature of the flesh with fleshly needs and appetites, but emotionally he was an Indian rajah determined that his widow should expire on his funeral pyre.

Once Robin had fixed up his own tomb so that it was reasonably cozy, he had arranged for Candelaria to visit him after her weekly tete-a-tete with Wayne. She came by at dusk on a hot, smoggy Sunday in February. Robin had spread out a picnic on the carpet under the slowly whirling rotors of a ceiling fan that he'd got by barter at the Earthday flea market in exchange for a bootleg tape of a Teeny-Weeny Jackson concert.

The phone rang. When Robin answered, there was only a silence. Candelaria was certain it was Wayne, and Robin was no longer so sure it couldn't be. His membership in the burial society was undermining his incredulity and common sense. He'd got into the habit of visiting Dona Eurides's shrine on the summit of Earthday and asking her advice on the subject of the particular nature of his passion for Candelaria—whether there would ever be a payoff or whether Candelaria would go on being faithful to Wayne until she joined him on the Other Side. Dona Eurides's replies were cheerfully ambiguous. Robin would be rewarded, but his reward might take an unexpected shape. As an oracle, Dona Eurides was not a lot more specific or helpful than the daily horoscope on TV, but there was something about hearing her gravely chuckle over the telephone that made Robin believe in Something.

He couldn't get more specific than that: Something. Not in literal disembodied entities that had once been Dona Eurides or Wayne or Anastasia King (with whom Robin had taken to playing canasta when he had nothing better to do) but in a more general *genius loci*, a Spirit of the Place that was somehow on his side, helping out and rooting for him, or at the very least wishing him well, like a friendly, invisible pet cocker spaniel watching attentively from his corner of the tomb and wagging his tail.

And then, in April, he got his reward, which came, as Dona Eurides had foreseen, in a totally unexpected shape.

He died. Just as he'd sensed that night walking home along the beach. A new virus got him, and he went to heaven. Wayne was there to welcome him, along with dear old dead-dull Sra. Vargas, and even Sra. King, though as soon as she'd said hello and welcome to Earthday, she excused herself to return to her card game.

The afterlife was pleasant in ways that Robin hadn't expected but also had its own forms of inconvenience. The dead bickered and connived much like the living. Finding ways to pass the time could be a problem. The sunlight could sometimes feel strangely wounding. But his obsession with Candelaria gradually eroded to a mild affection tinged with amusement. They really could never have been a couple. Robin could see that now from the vantage point of Eternity. It was nice of her to visit his tomb from time to time, and to tend the jade plant she'd placed beside the TV the day after his funeral. Sometimes she would forget to water it for weeks at a time, but jade plants are amazingly hardy beings. Besides, there was a leak in the roof of his tomb right above where Candelaria, with her uncanny intuition, had placed the terra cotta pot. ☯

# The P.E.R.N. Survey



Anne McCaffrey

"It's the third planet we want in this pernicious system," Castor said in a totally jaundiced tone with his eyes fixed on the viewscreen. "How's the hairpin calc going, Shavva?"

She looked up from her terminal, screwed up her face for a moment before she spoke. "I'm happy to report that that'll work out fine. Pity we can't have a look at the edge of the system," she added. "I'd love to have a look at those heavy-weight planets and the Oort cloud, but that can't be done when we've got to do an entry normal to the ecliptic. As it is, the slingshot will only give us ten days on the surface." She cast him an expectant, wry look.

He groaned. "We'll have to double up again." When she gave him a long, half-stern, half-

Illustration by Döring Andersen

sardonic glare, he added, "Fardles, Shavva, after so long together we all know enough of each other's specialties to do a fair report."

"Fair?" Ben Turnien said, his quirky eyebrows raised in amazement. "Fair, to whom?"

"Damn it, Ben, fair enough to know when a planet's habitable by humanoids: none of us need a zoologist any more to tell us which heastics are apt to be predatory. And each of us has certainly seen enough strange life forms and inimical atmospheres and surface conditions to know when to slap an interdiction on a planet."

There was a taut silence, a respectful one as the four remaining team members each vividly recalled the too recent deaths: Sevvie Asturias, the paleontologist-medec, and Flora Nevveshan, the zoologist-botanist, both lost on the last planet the Exploration and Evaluation team had visited. Castor had inscribed in bold letters on the top of that report: D. E. for dead end. Terbo, the zoologist-chemist, had been felled in a landslide on the first planet of their present survey tour, but that one had clearly supported some intelligent life so the initials I. L. F. ended that report. They'd lost Beldona, the second pilot and archeologist, on the third planet in the same accident that had injured Castor: a planet initialed G. O. L. D. I.—Good Only for Large Diversified Interests. And they'd orbited one that probes had given them all the information they needed to label it L. A.—lethal, avoid!

To a team that had been together for five missions, the casualties were deeply felt. This system, with its primary Rukhat, was the fifth of the seven to be investigated on their latest swing through this sector of space.

"We can handle the geology, the biology and the chemistry," Castor went on, frowning at the jellicast on his leg, which had not quite healed from the compound fractures incurred in the third system. "Well, I can do the analysis when you've brought appropriate samples back. We might not be able to do the usual in-depth analysis of all the biota, but we can find the requisite five possible landing sites, regular or serious meteoric impacts, any gross geological changes and if there's a dominant major life form."

"Hospitable planets are few enough, but Numero Tres does look very interesting," Mo Tan Liu remarked in his genteel voice. "I get good readings on atmosphere, gravity. I think probes are in order."

"Send 'em," Castor said. "Probes we got to spare." His lips began to twitch again at this further reminder of the recent disaster which had reduced an experienced team of eight to four.

"We're in a good trajectory to send off a homer, too," Liu added. "Federated Sentient Planets ought to know about the D. E. condition of Flora Asturias." The bizarre and perhaps macabre practice in the Exploration and Evaluation Corps was to name planets after team personnel who had been unfortunate to lose their lives during surface surveys. "We are obliged to report those and that L. A. immediately."

"All right, all right," Castor said, his tone irritable.

"Shall I do the report?" Shavva asked in an expressionless voice.

"I did it," Castor replied in a tone that ended discussion. He called up the program and, when the copy was ready, he rolled it up into a tube to be inserted in the homing capsule. It would reach their mother ship some weeks before their projected return. "They will want to know we've discovered another Oort cloud, too. Is it five or six?"

"Six with this one. I still don't buy that space virus theory," Ben remarked, relieved to switch to a less depressing topic.

"Number Four System was dead," Shavva said in an unequivocal tone.

"Can't prove the Oort cloud affected it in any way. Besides," Ben went on dispassionately, "the planet was bombarded by meteors and meteorites, to judge by the craters and the craterites. Shattered the surface and boiled off a good deal of the major oceans. Just like Shaula III. That system had an Oort cloud, too."

"But it had once supported life. We all saw the fossil remains in the cliff faces," Castor said.

"Like a road sign: life was here, it has gone hence." Shavva had been depressed by the landing. Ten days on a dead world had been nine and a half too many. The atmosphere was barely adequate and, to be on the safe side, they'd used support systems. A rough estimate suggested that the damage had been done close to a millennium ago. "At the beginning of Earth's Dark Age, this planet had found the final one."

"Pity, too. It must have once been a nice world. Great balance of land and water masses," Castor said.

"I don't know what could have stripped it so completely," said Ben.

"You never did like the Hoyle Wickramasingh theory, did you?"

"Has anyone ever found those space-formed viruses? Even a trace in any Oort cloud?" Ben stuck his chin out with a touch of belligerence. "I won't buy that space virus theory, not when a planet is covered with city-sized craters. To have both would be overkill, and the universe is conservative. One gets you just as dead as the other."

"I searched the library for data on other stripped planets. Asturias matches up on every particular," Liu said, his eyes on the screen. "What particulars there can be, that is!" He rose, stretched and yawned broadly. "What we really need is one in the process of being stripped."

Shavva gave a bark of laughter. "Fat chance of that."

Liu shrugged. "Something does it. Anyway, I feel that the virus theory would be the rarest probability while meteors are common, common, common. Look at what happened in our Earth's Cretaceous and Tertiary periods. We were just lucky! Probes away, Captain," he said formally to Castor. "Now, I'm for something to eat, then I'll pack the shuttle for the shot."

"I'll give you a hand," Shavva said. "I want to be sure we got what we need this time," she added in a low, angry voice, bitterly aware that Flora's negligence had cost her own life, and Asturias's. She was now the default leader of this understaffed team and she was not going to repeat previous mistakes.

As a young biologist with latent qualities as a nexialist,

she had joined the Exploration & Evaluation Corps for the diversity of duty, the thrill of being the first human to walk on unexplored planets and catalog new life forms, but she hadn't counted on losing friends in the process. EEC teams developed very close bonds, having to rely on each other's strengths and weaknesses in dangerous, stimulating and testing circumstances no textbook, indeed often no other team reports, could imagine. This was her fourth tour of duty but the first one punctuated by disasters. Castor, still recovering from the serious leg injury he sustained when he fell into a crevice on their third landing, was a competent pilot as well as a chemist and would remain on board as the exploratory vessel did its hairpin turn about the third planet. Shavva, Liu and Ben would do the field work.

Shavva would have to double as botanist on this trip. She had fortunately been sufficiently acquainted with Flora's work to have gleaned considerable basic botanical competence. She could certainly determine enough about the ecology of the plant life, if there were sufficient pollinators, what sort of competition there was for the food crops as well as the nutritional possibilities of the native forms and quite likely what disease agents and possible vectors existed within the ecology.

Ben was fortunately a geologist with enough chemistry to cope with the planet's basis pulse—its air and land masses, magnetic fields, mass-cons, continental plate structure, tidal patterns, temperatures, the general topography and, especially, its seismic activity if any, and evaluate the history of the planetary surface for at least the past million years. If the survey proceeded without unexpected glitches, he'd have a go at the longer term history, from magnetic reversals to sedimentary rocks, if present and usable, and if there'd been any regular large extinctions and date the last.

Liu, as nexialist, would investigate whatever remaining aspects of this planet they had time to consider. That is, if the probes brought back reports that would make a visit worthwhile. Numero Tres did look promising as they rushed towards it. Shavva had discovered that looks were very deceiving in this business. And not only looks.

The probe sent hack reports that were skeptically regarded as being too good to be true. Castor muttered and clucked as they gathered around the screen, taking notes as the computer processed the information.

"Good balance of land and water masses," Liu said. "Usual ice caps, mountains, good plains areas. Parallels Earth in many respects. Initial P. E. for starters, Castor."

"Atmosphere is breathable, slightly above normal in oxygen content: gravity slightly lower at 0.9 on the scale," Ben contributed. "Considerable volcanism in that chain of islands extending from the southern hemisphere, nothing major at the moment. Rather a nice little planet, actually."

"Plenty of green stuff down there," Shavva said. "What the hell?" she added in puzzlement as the computer began decoding topography. "Have a gawk at these crazy circles."

The probe was now on a low-altitude vector, sending back more detailed sections of the terrain of the southern

continent. Clearly visible were groups of circular patches . . . like ripples overlapping each other but held frozen on the planet's surface.

"Ever see anything like this before, Ben?" she asked, fervently regretting the missing Flora Neveshan, with her years of experience as a xeno-botanist to analyze this phenomenon.

"Can't say as I have. Looks like some sort of local fungus on a huge scale. Seems to hit all vegetated areas, not just what appear to be grasslands."

"Fairy rings?" Shavva suggested very brightly.

"Ha! What esoteric stuff you been reading recently?" Ben gave her a jaundiced stare.

"Whatever it is, he bloody careful, will you?" Castor demanded bitterly. "We've got two more systems to work . . . and I'm running out of initials."

"Thin red line of 'crosses'?" Ben asked, trying to inject some lightness into Castor's mood. He knew that Castor would forever fault himself for the deaths of Asturias and Neveshan. He was the most experienced climber of the group and would very likely have prevented the disaster if he'd been downside. The fact that no one faulted Castor did not assuage his feelings of guilt.

Shavva set the shuttle down on the great plain of the eastern southern hemisphere, several hundred meters from a cluster of the rippling circles they had observed. She, Ben and Liu went through the routine landing procedures, confirming atmosphere, temperature and wind velocity before exiting, garbed in the cumbersome protective suits. At least they needn't resort to face masks and the back-wrenching burden of oxygen canisters. They all drew in deep lungfuls of the fresh air that a stiff breeze flung at them.

"Good stuff," Shavva said with a pleased grin. "No L. A., this one." Suddenly, she felt an obsession for this planet to check out as habitable. From outer space it had had the look of the old Earth pictured in historical tapes. Such reassurance could be bloody, and bloodily, deceptive, she reminded herself, but that didn't keep her from wishing.

The grassy plain onto which they stepped was springy underfoot, and their heavy boots released sweet pungent odors from the bruised vegetation. Silently they walked over to the first of the ripples, Ben and Liu hunkering down, eyeballing it. Shavva took out a sampling probe and inserted it deftly into the soil, closing the lid as soon as she had retracted it. Liu poked a plas-gloved finger into the hole, fiddled with the dirt that adhered and dropped the grains carefully back into the hole.

"Funny. Feels like dirt. Common everyday dirt. Grainy. Rough, uneven."

"The empirical test!" Ben chuckled.

"Let's get started, guys," Shavva said. "We only got ten days to do eight people's work and clear a planet."

"A snap!" Ben replied, grinning impudently. "I'll start by switching on my geologist's brain." He moved off to the next arc of the ripple and collected more samples of the discolored ground. "Hey, we've got ecological succession here," he added suddenly, pointing to portions now speckled with new growth.

Shavva and Liu came to his side, seeing the promising green tufts.

"Great wind systems on this planet. They'd be strong enough to carry seed as well as dirt," she remarked, facing into the stiff breeze. "No other few decades and this'll all be grass, or whatever, again. Well, we'll see what the samples say. Take some right by that new growth, will you, Ben? See what is aiding the regeneration, if anything."

That first day they concentrated on dirt and vegetation samplings from that plain, moving on to other sites throughout the day, working from east to west to utilize as much daylight as possible. Ben added the odd rock or two but they were not, he remarked, all that unusual for this type of planet.

They took several deep cores in the rich soils of the southern plains and grasslands and, with more effort, drove rock sampling cores. Asturias had been the team paleontologist, but they'd have his notes back on the ship to guide their report. Inland and south they went, to points which had shown possible ore sites, though the initial metallurgy probe readings did not suggest that the planet had any easily accessible ore or mineral wealth. They made their first nightfall on a vast headland, poking north, on the sands of a great cove.

Marine life was diverse, with enough interesting variations of exoskeletons and sea vegetation alone to give a marine biologist lifetime employment. Liu scooped up samples of the red and green algae and found some interesting fungi on the shoreline, some with visible movement. Larger marine forms were occasionally visible in the deeper waters of the cove at dusk, a common feeding time. The explorers spent a pleasant evening taking samples and specimens along the seashore. Liu had found enough dead fronds and branches to build a fire on the sands. Shedding all but their protective footwear, they ate their evening rations around it—occasionally managing to capture various types of insectoids drawn to the bright flames.

"Possibly the pollinators we need," Liu mused as he peered into the tube of captured insectoids. One had paused in its frantic flight so that its double wings were visible. "Little buggers. I'd feel a lot better, though, if there were bigger things than these to contend with. The probe pictures should have shown us some sort of ruminants or grazers on these grasslands."

"What about those large flying things we saw a while back?" Ben asked, and then snorted. "They looked like airborne barges, squat and fat, and full."

"Yeah, but what do they eat? And what eats them?" Liu asked morosely.

"Maybe we're between ice ages?" Shavva offered hopefully. She really didn't want to find fault with the planet, a totally unprofessional attitude to take. And dangerous as well. But she couldn't suppress the feeling of "coming home" which was beginning to color all her perceptions of this world.

Liu snorted, unconvinced. "Ecology is right for 'em. They should be here."

"If they are, we'll find 'em. If we don't . . ." and Shavva shrugged philosophically.

The next day they ventured as far as the ice cap in the southern hemisphere, taking samples of the frozen crust and as far into the soil as the deep corer could plunge itself. Then they turned to the winter-held north. By then, Liu had become a bit paranoid about the lack of larger life forms. Reptiloids they had seen, scaled and basking.

"Quite large enough, thank you," Shavva had remarked, narrowly escaping the attentions of a ten-centimeter-thick, seven-meter-long example. They saw a great many more of Liu's flying barges.

"Wherries, that's what they were called," he said suddenly that afternoon. "Vessels that were used to ferry stuff between the English Isle and the European continent. Wherries, and call 'em the biggest life forms seen in the report. Maybe the term'll stick." Liu rarely exercised that EEC team prerogative.

There were two identifiable types of the large avians, with raucous calls and the aggressive manners of predators, brilliantly plumed smaller, feathered fliers, a thousand types of what Shavva called "creepy-crawlies," both inland and littoral. They had also discovered egg shells on southern beaches, shards littering what were apparently sand-buried nests. Of the egg-layers, or the previous occupants, nothing.

They did discover interesting fossil remains in an extensive tar pit, a good fifty thousand years dead and gone, but one specimen intact enough to expose the ground-down dental machinery for grazing: suggesting that they could be the ruminants Liu wished to see. While the short green spiky vegetation could be called "grass," it wasn't, for it had no silicates, was visibly triangular in form and more blue than green.

"I want to see those grazers now, too," Liu said firmly. But he was somewhat relieved to find the necessary variety of life forms at a different epoch on the planet. It was not uncommon for life forms to remain dormant over difficult seasons, sometimes for years, until conditions were appropriate for a resurgence. Since the strange overlapping circles occurred on the grasslands and plains (also in the forests and even in the jungles, Ben reminded them), they could not connect them to the absence of expectable life forms though the conclusion was logical.

They also found a diamond pipe just below the surface in the major rift valley fault. Rough stones, one as large as Shavva's fist, were pried out of the soil. They kept several as souvenirs, for the galaxy had produced many more exotic gemstones than these, though diamonds remained useful in technology for their durability and strength.

"I find it rather a relief not to have to be constantly on guard," Ben said on their third night when Liu began again on the disappearance theme. "Remember Closto, the L. A. in our last tour? I kept holding my breath, waiting for something else to latch onto me."

Liu snorted. "Absence is as ominous as presence in my tapes."

"Could have been an axial tilt, you know, and what's now the ice caps was their homegrounds," Shavva suggested. "They got caught in the blizzards and froze. We do have ice cores which could very well produce tissue and bone fragments."

"Well, this P. E. has only a 15-degree axial tilt; the probes set the magnetic poles very near the ecliptic north and south, maybe 15 degrees away from tilt."

"We'll know when we get back to the ship and have a chance to study things. Are today's samples ready to go back to Castor?"

"Yeah, but I wish the fardles he'd sent us back *bis* conclusions. He's had time," Liu went on, scowling as he handed his latest containers to Ben to pack in the case to be launched back to the space craft.

"Maybe they all moved north," Ben said in a spirit of helpfulness.

"To winter?"

"This continent's not in full summer yet."

"Well, it'd never get hot enough to fry things, not with the prevailing winds this continent's got." Liu refused to be mollified.

On their way north they paused on the largest of a group of islands; basaltic, riddled with caves, bearing the profusion and lush growth common to tropical climes. They noted several unusual reptilian forms, more properly large herpetoids of truly revolting appearance.

"I've seen uglier ones," Ben remarked, examining at a safe distance one horny monster, seven centimeters broad and five high, which waved tentacles and claws in an aggressive manner. They could discern neither mouth or eyes. The olfactor gave a stench reading, apparently beloved of some insectoid forms, for the creature's back was covered with trapped bodies.

"External digestive system?" Shavva suggested, peering at the thing. "And . . . wow!"

The creature had sped forward suddenly, its nether end now covered with tiny barbs. While it emitted no sound, the olfactor reading went off the scale and a repellent stench filled the little clearing.

"Look, it backed into that spiny plant," Ben said, pointing to the little bush. "And got shot in the ass."

Standing well back and using a long stick, Shavva nudged one of the remaining spines and was rewarded with a second launching.

"Well, a clever plant. Didn't just let loose in all directions. I wonder what would deactivate it?"

"Cold?" Liu suggested.

"There's a small one here." She sprayed it with the cryo, gave it an exploratory prod which elicited no response, and found an appropriate-size specimen box from the supply sled in which to pack it.

That evening as they were readying the day's tube for Castor, Liu let out a whoop, holding up for the others to see a glowing specimen tube.

"That growth I found in the big cave. Some sort of luminous variety of mycelium." He covered it with his hand. "Indeed. Now you see it"—he opened his hand to let the tube glow again—"now you don't." He closed his hand again, peering through thin cracks he permitted between two fingers. "Does oxygen trigger the luminosity?"

"You are not going back into the cave tonight, Liu," Shavva said sternly. "We don't have the spelunking equipment necessary to keep you from breaking your damned foot neck."

He shrugged. "Luminous lichens or organisms are not my forte." He carefully wrapped the tube in opaque plastic. "Don't want it to wear itself out before Castor sees it."

That evening they were all enticed from their camp by the sound of cheeping and chittering. Parting the lush foliage that surrounded them, they peered out at an astonishing scene. Graceful creatures, totally different from the awkward avians seen in the southern hemisphere, were performing aerial acrobatics of astonishing complexity. The setting sun sparkled off green, blue, brown, bronze and golden backs, and translucent wings glistened like airborne jewels.

"The seaside egg-layers?" Shavva asked Liu in a whisper.

"Quite possibly," Liu replied softly. "Gorgeous. Look, they're playing a discernible game. Catch-me-if-you-can!"

For a long time, the three explorers watched the spectacle with delight until the creatures broke off their play as the swift tropical night darkened the skies.

"Sentient?" Shavva asked, wanting and not wanting those beautiful creatures to be a dominant sentient life of this planet.

"Marginally," Liu murmured approvingly. "If they're leaving eggs on a shoreline where storm waters could wash them away, they're not possessed of very great intelligence."

"Just beauty," Ben said. "Perhaps we'll find large and related types of the same evolutionary ancestors for you, Liu."

Liu shrugged diffidently as he turned back to their campfire. "If we do, we do."

They made notes of what they had witnessed and then turned in for the night. The next day had them examining the reef systems jutting out from the island, and its smaller companions. A trip to the more tropical eastern peninsula showed them a complicated system, similar to coral, with fossils of the same thing going right back, Ben estimated, some five hundred million years. At least this was a viable ecology, not a stalemated tropical rain forest dense ecology, with the various elements, so to speak, taking in each other's washing. Such transitory ecologies did reinforce Ben's theory of a recent meteorite storm rather than an ice-age hiatus in evolution.

The bare circles were planetwide, except at the caps and one small band of the southern hemisphere, and though the survey team had thoroughly investigated, they could not find the meteorites which might have been the cause. Nor, Ben fretted, were any of the circles either deep enough or overlapping in the pattern that a multiple meteorite impact would provide.

The northern hemisphere, though in part blanketed by thick snows, was duly cored for soil and rock samplings. Mud flats, emitting the usual dense sulphurous fumes all over the central plain's vast river delta, produced more regularities than differences, certainly a plethora of promising bacteria over which Shavva crowded. Further inland, up the broad navigable riverway, they found adequate lodes of iron, copper, nickel, tin, vanadium, bauxite and even some germanium but none of the generous quanti-

ties of metals and minerals that would interest a mining consortium. Those almost preferred asteroids and dead planets: avoiding attacks by the Green and Ecological protectors.

On the next to last morning of their survey, Ben found gold nuggets in a brash mountain stream.

"A real old-fashioned world," he remarked, tossing and catching the heavy nuggets in his hand. "Old Earth once had free gold in streams, too. Another parallel."

Shavva leaned over and took one which was an almost perfect drop, holding it between thumb and forefinger.

"My loot," she said, dropping it into her belt pouch.

She found one extremely interesting plant on the upper section of the eastern peninsula: a vigorous plant whose bark, when bruised in the fingers, gave off a pungent smell. That evening, she made an infusion of the bark, sniffing appreciatively of its aroma. Empiric tests showed that it was not toxic, and her judicious sip of the infusion made her sigh with pleasure.

"Try it, Liu, tastes great!"

Liu regarded the thin dark liquid with suspicion but he, too, found the odor stimulating to his salivary glands and wet his lips, smacking to spread the taste. "Hmmm,

not bad. Bit watery. Infuse it a bit longer, or reduce the liquid. You might have something here."

Ben joined in the sampling and, when Shavva experimented with grinding the bark and filtering hot water through it, he approved the result.

"A sort of combination of coffee and chocolate, I think, with a spicy aftertaste. Not bad."

So Shavva harvested a quantity of the bark, and they used it as a beverage for the remaining two days. She saved enough to bring back to Castor as a treat.

Though none of the three made mention of the fact, they were all sorry to leave the planet and yet relieved that there had been no further accidents or untoward circumstances. Barring some unforeseen factor discovered in the analyses of soil, vegetation and biological samples, they were all three quite willing to let Castor initial it P. E. R. N.: parallel Earth, resources negligible. He added a C in the top corner of the report, indicating the planet was suitable for colonization.

That is, if any colonial group wanted to settle on a pastoral planet, far off the established trade routes, and about as far from the center of the Federated Sentient headquarters as one could go in the known galaxy. ♦

## About the Authors

A story by **Ursula K. Le Guin** last appeared in this magazine exactly a year ago, when we celebrated her 30th anniversary as a published writer. So, technically, "Dancing to Ganam" serves as an observance of her 31st anniversary—but a new Le Guin story published at any time is cause for celebration in itself.

"I am very pleased with the Cctian physicists for inventing churten technology," says Ursula. "Since nobody, even on Anarres, yet understands how churtening works, or even exactly what it does—except that it appears to achieve transience, or instantaneous travel across any distance—I am free to explore its operation, implications, and side-effects via fiction, first in 'The Shobies' Story' and now 'Dancing to Ganam.'"

The first story **James Lawson** sold was "Sanctuary," which came out in our November 1988 issue and ended up on the Nebula Award ballot. Now he's back with "Hellado," his fourth published short story. He prefers to maintain a low profile personally, saying only that he lives in the Southwest and travels frequently on business for the U.S. government. His

next overseas journey will involve work in Africa on high-velocity atmospheric re-entry.

**Thomas M. Disch** says that "The Burial Society" sprang from his experiences while touring Brazil in 1991 on a speaking tour for the United States Information Agency. "A great deal of what may seem like invention of a post-modern Brazilian culture is actually reportage," he tells us. "In a suburb of Curitiba there is a cemetery that is, architecturally, the prototype of the one I've 'invented.'"

In a career in this genre that spans 40 years, **Anne McCaffrey** has averaged a little more than one novel and one short story per year—but "The P.E.R.N. Survey" marks the first time this magazine has used a piece of her shorter work. We're proud to weave yet another thread into the rich tapestry of the world of Pern.

This issue features a lot of prominent writers, which makes it fitting that we also include **Paul Di Filippo's** homage to the field's most prominent editor. Once you visit "Campbell's World," you may never look at

science fiction quite the same way ever again. . . .

. . . And after you read "The Triumph of Postmodernism, With Flamingos" by **Alexander Jablakov**, you might never look at a lawn jockey the same way ever again. "I've always had an interest in architecture," says Alex, "but this is the first story I've written that deals with it specifically."

The prolific and versatile **James Salter** is back again with "Dawn Over Doldrums," a story that manages to be both somber and uplifting. Jim tells us that he wrote the story shortly after rereading some of Stanislaw Lem's work, and he wasn't sure if it was a good idea to let himself be influenced that way. Well . . . it was.

This month's novella, "The Tarnished Diamond," marks the debut of **Mike Resnick** in these pages. It's an extended excerpt from the beginning of his newest novel, *Inferno: Chronicle of a Distant World*. Since Mike provided an introduction that sets the scene much better than we could, we'll simply refer you to page 75 and consider *this* page all filled up. ♦

# Campbell's World



Paul Di Filippo

Campbell was dead.

Even now, sitting here listening to one tearful, soulful eulogy after another, I couldn't quite believe it. The man had been too big to die, there had been too much life in him. He had bestrode the SF field like a Titan for so long, had given so much, that his departure seemed unthinkable, leaving a gaping hole in the universe. It was so unfair that it was all I could do to sit here quietly when what I really wanted to do was rage—

I stopped myself. What was I thinking? Campbell surely wouldn't have wanted me to feel this way. He had had no fear of death, no regrets at its approach. In his last days, sensing that his time on this plane was limited, he had calmly discussed his passing, seeking to de-individualize it by referring

Illustration by Frank Kelly Freas



to it as "The Death," establishing his common mortality, shared with all humanity. . . .

My eyes found a meditative focus, a big omega-shaped floral wreath with a banner bearing Campbell's name and dates: 1901–1987. I started up my mantra, which Campbell himself had given me, and in a few minutes I felt a measure of acceptance and peace wash over me.

So many people owed Campbell so much. Not least of all the eighteen-year-old Navajo boy named Jake Highwater, concealed now inside the body and mind of this suddenly weeping old man. . . .

It was September 30, 1937. The date is engraved forever on my heart.

I stood outside the Street and Smith building in Manhattan. It was a mildly warm day, but that didn't explain the sweat drenching my best shirt and ill-fitting suit, or my clammy hands which clutched a large manila envelope secured with a string clasp. My body was not reacting to the heat, but rather to a large case of nerves.

In a few minutes, if all went well, I would be standing in the presence of the new editor of *Astounding Stories*, a man named Campbell who had just taken over from the venerable F. Orlin Tremaine (who was all of thirty-eight years old at the time). And I would be trying—if I still had a voice or a thought in my head by then—to sell him a story I had written.

I had been reading *Astounding* for four years, ever since Street and Smith had resurrected the old Clayton pulp. First, just the odd issue or two which had filtered into the reservation hack home in Arizona. Then, once Uncle Redbird—who worked at the Navy Yards—invited Ma and me to come live with him in Brooklyn, I had managed to get all the back issues I had missed, and keep up with the new ones as well.

I knew nothing about this Campbell; he hadn't even produced an issue yet by which I could get some sense of him and his tastes. I had only learned of the changeover by accident, when I had called last week and asked to speak to Tremaine.

"Mister Tremaine is Editorial Director for the whole Street and Smith chain now. Which magazine does your business concern?"

"Uh, *Astounding*—"

"The man in charge there now is Mister Campbell," the switchboard operator informed me briskly. "Shall I put you through?"

The news totally unthumbed my carefully planned speech praising Tremaine's work.

"Uh, no," I stammered, "that's okay. I mean—"

And then I hung up.

Where or how I had found the courage to show up a week later on the actual doorstep of the magazine I adored, I cannot now recall. It had taken me months after I had written my story just to work myself up to call Tremaine, whom I felt I somehow knew. Now, I had inexplicably nerved myself up to this frontal assault on a complete stranger.

Suddenly conscious of the damage my sweaty hands were doing to my rolled-up manuscript, I tucked it under

one arm, straightened Uncle Redbird's borrowed tie, and went in.

The elevator operator brought me up. The magnificent thump of the presses soon surrounded me, for much of Street and Smith's production was done right here, amidst the editorial offices.

Soon I was standing in front of Campbell's secretary. The plaque on her desk identified her as MISS ERDMAN, and she was exotically gorgeous. Black hair in a roll above her ears, pug nose, wide smiling mouth. I couldn't place her features, but they were definitely not one hundred percent Anglo. Dressed in a white suit, she seemed to be not much older than me, and I fell instantly in love.

"May I help you?"

"I—I'd like to see Mister Campbell. That is, if he's not too busy."

"He is rather pressed for time. May I ask what it's in reference to?"

"I've got a story to show him."

Her smile widened, then politely shrank to businesslike dimensions. "Oh, well, in that case . . . Would you mind waiting?" She indicated a seat close to her desk.

"No, of course not." I was prepared to wait all day, so long as she was there.

People came and went, bustling or leisurely. The glorious, glamorous Miss Erdman dealt with one and all efficiently and with good humor. In between, we somehow began to talk.

She was a dance student with someone named Martha Graham, working here only to pay the bills. Her family was rich—she had recently taken a round-the-world cruise with them—but she preferred not to rely on their money. Anyhow, they lived in Hawaii, where she had been born, so she was on her own here.

And what, I asked, did she think of her new boss?

Her face was transfigured as if with sunlight, and my heart sank. It was plain that no man would ever come up in her estimation to this mysterious new editor.

"Oh, Mister Campbell is just wonderful. He's so smart! He has his master's from Columbia, you know—medieval studies. He's been to Europe, met Joyce and Mann and Sylvia Beach. But his main interest isn't really literature, it's— Well, if I mention that he reads Sanskrit and knows Krishnamurti—?"

Her esoteric clues left me completely in the dark, and my face must have shown it.

"Oh, well, never mind. You'll find out as soon as you meet him, everyone does. He just kind of radiates this ancient power, a power of ideas—"

I wanted to say something about the new editor's interests. But all the names she had tossed out so devoutly meant nothing to me, and I was ashamed to admit it. Frankly, I was also kind of jealous to hear this Campbell praised so effusively by this beautiful woman.

"I suppose he's not much of a science man, then?" I said, hoping to cut him down to size.

"Oh, no," Miss Erdman shot back, "just the opposite. He thinks science is very important. He wouldn't have gotten the job otherwise. And just a few years ago he spent months as an apprentice to the biologist Ed Rick-

etts. They went up the West Coast, all the way from Carmel to Sitka, Alaska, collecting intertidal fauna. That's when he became friends with John Steinbeck. And Mister Campbell is very well read in history too, if you count that a science."

I made one last stah. "I guess he's one of those egghead professor types, then."

Miss Erdman giggled. "Not entirely. He was on the Columbia track team. He came within two seconds of setting a world record for the half-mile."

I knew when I was heaten. This Campbell sounded like some kind of god. Sitting back in my chair, I assumed a crestfallen silence.

Hours passed. People with appointments went in and out of Campbell's office, but I never saw the man himself. Until just around four o'clock.

A tall fellow in his mid-thirties appeared at the inner door. Copiously wavy-haired, large-nosed, strong-jawed, he reminded me of the big, bluff Irish cops in my neighborhood. But that first impression was partially dispelled when he spoke in a cultivated voice, firm yet compassionate.

"Miss Erdman, I'm afraid I won't be taking any more appointments today—"

I shot to my feet and words rushed involuntarily forth. "But sir, I've been waiting all afternoon—!"

Campbell opened his mouth, and I knew he was going to foh me off. But then his gaze happened to fall on my belt.

The buckle was a massive turquoise-studded one from the Reservation.

The next words out of Campbell floored me, for they were a greeting in Navajo.

Sensing my utter confusion, Campbell advanced. Putting an arm around my shoulder, he smiled, then turned to address his secretary.

"As I was saying, Miss Erdman, this young man is going to be my last appointment of the day."

Miss Erdman flashed that bewitching smile. "I'll make sure you're not disturbed."

And then I was inside *Astounding's* inner sanctum, behind the door with the fresh gold leaf spelling out the new editor's name.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL.

After ushering me to a leather-padded seat, Campbell perched himself on the edge of his desk, one foot resting on the floor. A runner's muscles defined themselves beneath the fabric of his trouser legs.

At last I found my voice. "You speak Navajo—"

Campbell laughed, a hearty booming. "Hardly. Just a few words. Picked them up in my reading. Been reading about Amerindians since I was a kid. You know Elmer Gregor? No? Excellent writer on your people. I got to meet him when I was young. As a lark, we used to communicate at the dinner table in Indian sign language. Drove my folks nuts! What a grand, living, hreathing introduction to the subject!"

Suddenly, I wanted nothing more than to read this Elmer Gregor, even though he would doubtlessly have nothing to tell me except second-hand information about my own tribe! But that's just how it was with Campbell.

His excitements were contagious. Whatever topic was uppermost in his mind and conversation would soon dominate any listener.

Campbell zeroed in on my manuscript, which I had forgotten I was holding. "Something you want me to read?"

Wordlessly I passed it over. Campbell retreated to the far side of his desk and sat.

"Mother to the World." Nice, very nice."

He picked up a red pencil. "You don't mind if I mark it up a bit, do you? I'm afraid that underlining is my form of meditation."

I hurried to shake my head no, and he smiled and got to work.

Twenty minutes later, he looked up. His dark eyes bored into mine, and I felt naked.

"This is based on one of the legends of Estsanatlehi, 'the woman who changes,' is it not? The one where she creates mankind from slivers of her own flesh. . . ."

I knew now I was in the presence of a shaman. This man could read souls.

Gulping, I tried to reply. "Y-yeah. I mean, yes, sir, it is. You see, I thought that the old legend sounded like modern tissue culturing. So I imagined that there was only one woman left alive after some kind of plague, and she was a scientist and had to recreate the race and she—"

Campbell held up a hand to stop me from reciting the whole story. "Your instincts are good, Jake," he said, taking my name from the first page of my manuscript. "Don't apologize." He handed the story back to me, obviously a rejection, and I stood to go.

"Wait a minute, son. Aren't you interested in how much we're paying?"

I froze. "Paying?"

"As soon as you make those changes I've penciled in, that is. Retype it, bring it back, and I'll cut the check. One hundred dollars, two cents a word. We'll probably run it in the July issue."

Nerveless, I dropped back into the chair.

"There's only one catch. You've got to listen to a little lecture first."

I snapped my jaw shut, and dumbly nodded.

Campbell stood and began to pace the office. He was plainly reciting a well-rehearsed speech—at the same time that he was using my reactions to refine and strengthen it.

"You see, Jake, I took this job over an offer to teach at Sarah Lawrence college—even though it pays much less—for one reason and one reason only. Because I want a public forum for my ideas, a place to stand where I can use the lever I think I've discovered in order to move the world in the direction of greater harmony."

"Our culture is in trouble, Jake. We're stuck smack dab in the middle of a stage that Spengler has identified as one of crisis and disintegration. Like the moraine at the end of a glacier, all the old beliefs are piled up around us, rootless and withering. This is a time when those old beliefs are dying—and new beliefs have the potential to be born. These replacement beliefs—these myths, to use an old-fashioned term which I much prefer—will partake of both old and new. They can be creative reworkings of old myths, like your story, or brand-new images never be-

fore unearthed, but which somehow ring as true as the old ones.

"These new myths are going to have to take modern science heavily into account. You cannot deal with the world of A.D. two thousand with the science of two thousand B.C. That's the part that comes from the head. But the most important part of these new myths—the oldest, eternal kernel—is going to have to come from the heart. If the stories I envision and want to print are going to have any chance at reaffirming and restructuring the lives of *Astounding's* readers—and through them, the civilization at large—then they're going to have to arise from somewhere deep inside the writers.

"I can't afford to publish anything inauthentic, any stories that don't arise from deeply felt wellsprings within the author's own breast. I'm talking about getting in touch with the archetypes that exist inside all of us, ancient figures of wisdom and magic, deities and guides."

Over the next five decades, I was to hear this speech or some variant of it more times than I could count. It would never fail to move me, sometimes rekindling inspiration that I thought had died for good. But never would it mean more to me than this first time. I was mesmerized, imprinting utterly on Campbell's vision.

"There's going to be a clean sweep here at the magazine," Campbell continued. "Hackwork will no longer find a home here, and I'm changing the name slightly with the next issue as a subtle indication of it. The subtitle will no longer read 'stories of science-fiction' but rather 'stories of SF.' And that abbreviation will stand for 'Sacred Fiction' or 'Symbolic Fiction' as much as it stands for 'Science Fiction.'"

"Any of the older writers who can make the transition will be welcome. But I really don't expect many of them to understand what I want, or be capable of providing it. That's why I have to find new writers, men like yourself, Jake. Writers from every possible culture, ones who are open to their inner voices, who haven't fossilized yet. And not just men, for Athena's sake! I want women in these pages! They're half the human race, for crying out loud! I want the actual nurturing milk of their tits on the pages of *Astounding*!"

I must have blushed, for Campbell toned down his rhetoric.

"Jake, we have a chance with this magazine to put Western civilization back in touch with the essential ground of all phenomena, the void out of which everything arises. We can get this messed-up century back on track. But I can't do it alone. Can I rely on your help?"

At that point, I would have gladly descended like Orpheus to Hades itself for Campbell. I jumped to my feet and grabbed his hand.

"You can count on me, Mister Campbell!"

His questing mind had already moved on to other matters. "Great, great, great," he intoned, leading me out and hailing his secretary. "Jean, why don't you go ahead and draw up contracts for Mister Highwater's story. I'm sure he'll have it revised for us by next week."

Miss Erdman—Jean—jumped up, squealing with glee, then hugged me and kissed me on the cheek.

Did I say Hades? You could've added in the hells of Dante, Milton and Bunyan too.

This was the start of my fifty-year association with *Astounding* and Joseph Campbell and his quest to remake the world nearer to his heart's desire. Whether he—we—truly succeeded or not, I have no idea. All I know is that those five decades passed like one of Vishnu's half-hours.

The July 1938 issue of *Astounding* in which my first story did eventually run is generally acknowledged to be the beginning of Campbell's finest period, if only for the electrifying newness of it all. With vivid mythic SF stories by Baker, Suzuki, Orzbal, Chen, and Chaiwallah, he set the exact tone he had been aiming for, a kind of global voice that spoke intimately out of mankind's past to its common future. The issues following, with work by Mahfouz, Minh, Sienkiwicz, Okri and others, maintained that standard.

I began to visit Campbell weekly. We were sketching out a series of stories based on the Navajo myths about the two brothers, Nayenezgani and Tobadzistsini, the famous slayers of monsters. My two heroes were interplanetary adventurers who journeyed from world to world helping the inhabitants deal with the strange lifeforms on each. Although there was plenty of violence—Campbell had nothing against violence, viewing it as integral to our hominid origins—I tried to introduce an element of diplomacy and compromise that I thought made a nice change from the way aliens were usually handled—the way my people had been handled by the whites.

And throughout, I was treated to Campbell's views on everything from movies ("didactic pornography without any spirituality") to sexual mores ("strictly determined by culture") to writing ("You can write a sentence the way you would have written it last year, or you can write it the way you're thinking *now*."). Over the years, as Campbell's enormous widespread and ongoing reading was filtered through his exuberant talk and down to me, I received an education equal to any college degree.

Much to my joy, Campbell seemed to regard me as a son, especially when he heard my own father was dead of alcoholic kidney failure.

"Yes, yes," he said, regarding me keenly, "the orphan, the journey, the old patterns of the monomyth repeat forever. . . ."

After that, he was even kinder, if such were possible.

Early in 1939, two important things happened.

Campbell married Jean Erdman, who was almost twenty years younger than he. I didn't realize how deep my feelings were for her—feelings she had never shown a sign of reciprocating—until the day of the wedding, when, halfway through the ceremony, I had to get up and leave, hot tears suddenly sluicing down my face.

But I was only twenty, and healed fast. Or so I thought. Jean remained at her job, and I managed to chat breezily with Mrs. Campbell each time I visited. Nor were my respect and admiration for Joe altered either.

Admittedly, the marriage was a big change for all of us. But it was only a personal one. Larger forces, however, were at work in the world.

One day I walked into Campbell's office and found him

absorbed in that day's *Tribune*. Noticing me, he tossed the paper down with a snort of disgust.

"What do you make of the situation in Europe, Jake?"

I mumbled the conventional wisdom, about how Hitler could be placated with a little territory. But Campbell vehemently disagreed.

"No, Jake, the man is a sorcerer, a black magician. To anyone who knows the myths, it's plain as day. Don't forget where Faust hailed from. No, Hitler won't rest content until he's amassed all the power he can grab. Unless someone puts a halt to his schemes, I predict that the world will soon be plunged into chaos. It will be *Götterdämmerung*."

With the cockiness of an apprentice, I said, "And you and *Astounding* are the only ones who can stop him, right?"

Campbell knocked his chair over as he shot to his feet.

"That's it! Jake, you're a genius!"

That very night, he was on a train for Washington.

I never learned till years later how he got an interview with FDR. Turned out one of his old Columbia professors had become an undersecretary in the administration, and this ex-teacher managed to swing it. Nor did I ever fully understand how Campbell convinced the President to finance his mad scheme. But knowing how persuasive my editor could be, I could well imagine the oratory he had used.

However it happened, two months later *Astounding* was publishing a German edition.

None of the stories, however, were translations. They were all originals, composed partially by Campbell and partially by a group of German expatriates—including a psychologist named Jung—whom he had assembled. And the fictions were all cleverly and subliminally crafted with one goal in mind: toppling Hitler and the Nazis.

I read a few of the stories in English, but they meant nothing to me aside from the surface plotting. I remember that one in particular was all about piglike aliens, and I thought it quite inferior to my own series. I mentioned this to Campbell.

"Of course they don't push your buttons, Jake. They're slanted toward the Teutonic mind. The monomyth takes the form of *Elementargedanken* specific to each culture. But believe me, these stories are hitting the German people like bullets."

And of course he was right, as I learned with a shock when the news of Hitler's assassination reached America. The wirephoto of the dead assassin was just detailed enough for me to see the top of an issue of the German *Astounding* projecting from his coat pocket.

The Nazi Party, falling prey to internecine squabbling, managed to remain in power for a few months, but were soon deposed semi-peacefully by Christian Democrats (who used the Grail as their party symbol). Without support, the Fascists in Spain and Italy soon went under too. Europe settled down to its usual somnolence, and we anticipated doing the same.

But it was not to be.

Joe, Jean and I were celebrating the downfall of the Nazis with a bottle of champagne in the office when the phone rang. Campbell picked it up.

"Hello? Yes! Yes, sir. Will do!"

He hung up, looking as dazed as I've ever seen him.

"That was the President. He wants to see a mockup of a Pan-Asian issue of the magazine as soon as possible."

We finished our drinks and got to work.

It was about one hundred issues later that Joe decided on his own to initiate yet another foreign version of the magazine. This time, because conditions in the target country were relatively safe, he went abroad for a few months to supervise the new operation personally.

But he left Jean at home.

Back a week early from Leningrad, he walked in on us naked in his bed.

Overwhelming mortification and guilt swept over me. I couldn't even remember how I had ended up here. It had been as if I were moving in a dream. How could I have betrayed my closest friend in this way?

"Joe," I began, looking to an unperturbed Jean for support, "I don't know how to explain—"

Campbell laughed softly, and apparently without bitterness or irony.

"Jake, I never told you, did I, that 'SF' could stand for 'Shakti Fiction' as well. Jean is my shakti, the living embodiment of feminine power, my fount of endless energy. There is an alchemical marriage between us which you could never disrupt. You can only share in her limitless abundance. I told her I thought a liaison would be good for your writing, and she agreed."

And then he hung up his hat and joined us.

Six months later the Neo-Czarist Revolution broke out. Six months after that, Stalin was hanging from a lamppost in Red Square.

The following years were the busiest of my life. The strange relationship among Campbell, Jean and me did indeed spur my writing. I began a series of stories about futuristic weather-control, based on the myths of the Navajo rain and sun gods, Tonenilli and Tsohanoui.

Readership of *Astounding* in America was now second only to that of *Life* magazine, an unheard-of stature for a fiction pulp. We went glossy and upped the payrate several times. We attracted people like Aldous Huxley, who let us serialize his *The Perennial Philosophy*. Campbell filled a goodly number of pages himself, with his rambling survey of mythology, history and science entitled *The Outline of Everything*.

Campbell's competitors had tried to emulate him, with mixed results. Mostly, they failed, lacking his purity of vision and motives. There was no one who could touch him.

No one in the field of literature, that was.

Campbell was called before McCarthy's HUAC in September 1953, on charges of "promulgating foreign fairy tales meant to subvert American values." He left with a smile on his face. It proved to be McCarthy's final month in office.

I have never seen a man so utterly humiliated and destroyed by "mere" metaphor before or since. The televised hearings eventually captured the attention of the entire nation, which watched raptly as Campbell turned the hullyng Senator into a pile of jello. Every absurd and strident charge McCarthy made was met slantwise with

an appropriate anecdote or tale culled from Campbell's immense stock. Like some modern yet ancient Uncle Remus or Homer or Ovid, Campbell rebutted and ridiculed every tactic and assault with humor and wisdom. It was like watching a martial arts master turn every blow of his opponent back on the attacker. By the end of the hearings, McCarthy could barely frame a complete sentence while Joe was cool as Shadrach in the furnace.

The confession they found on McCarthy's body, though splattered with the Senator's self-shattered brains, was still readable enough to bring Vice-President Nixon down with him on treason charges.

As the sixties dawned, I found the vein of my writing petering out. I had dealt with every significant Navajo myth, and no other material appealed to me—or could, by Campbell's theory. Even Jean and her attentions couldn't inspire me, and I soon stopped seeing her, fearing that one kind of impotence would breed another.

My block wasn't helped by the changes at the magazine. First, Campbell actually renamed it entirely: it was now called *Ananda Mythic Fiction Mythic Fact*, after the Sanskrit word for "bliss." The masthead bore the motto "Transparent to transcendence." I was against the change, and felt that the magazine I had fallen in love with so long ago was no more. Campbell also started preaching global unity, which I thought fine in theory, but not practicable. I was beginning to be more concerned about the plight of my own people, and how they lagged behind the rest of the country.

Then there were all the new writers coming in, young kids like Ballard and Delany and Zelazny who had been raised on the work of me and my peers, and were taking SF—or MF, as they now referred to it—in new, strange directions I didn't entirely understand. Campbell kept current somehow, and encouraged me to continue, but I just couldn't.

The day I told him I was leaving New York is almost as sharp in my mind as that day in '37, although they stood over twenty-five years apart.

"So it's back to the reservation for you, Jake? Well, I can't say I blame you. A man needs to get back to his roots at a certain point. You've got to cross the return threshold with the knowledge you've gained and give it to those who need it. Anyway, you're still young—compared to a greybeard like me. I'm sure you'll accomplish everything you set out to do."

"It's about time I used some of that obscenely high money you've paid me over the years. I'm going to plow it back into improving conditions for my people. I've got a lot of plans. . . ."

I tapered off. There was nothing else to say.

Campbell and I shook hands, and I walked out.

There was a young girl at Jean's desk—I forget her name now. Jean had left the job once she and Joe got rich, to concentrate on her dancing, and she was in fact on tour that year as the teacher of her own troupe. The thump of the presses and smell of the ink and paper were long gone; the Street and Smith printing plant was out in Jersey, and Joe's office was located in a modern midtown tower. But somehow, despite the differences, I felt as if it were 1937 again, and I were just starting my career.

"Don't forget my address if you write anything new—son," called out Joe, and then I was out in the hall.

I did write three or ten or twelve more pieces in the next two decades, including a special one for the fiftieth anniversary issue a month ago, the celebrations for which had been the last time I had seen Campbell alive. My "lifetime subscription" brought every new issue out to Arizona, and I managed to read something in each, sometimes with enjoyment, sometimes not. And I did visit Joe and Jean every few years, as my rapidly expanding chores and duties as head of the Navajo Nation permitted.

But the magic of those early years was gone, never to be recaptured.

Most certainly not now, now that Campbell was dead.

\* \* \*

The last speaker was a bare-breasted priestess for the Temple of the Goddess. I came out of my reverie and found a handkerchief to dry my eyes just as she was finishing. Leaving the podium, she dropped a sheaf of maize on Campbell's coffin. Then the pallbearers stood up, and I was one of them.

Jean, still beautiful under the weight of her years, led the cortege out of the Osirian church, wearing the crown of Isis.

We carried the coffin past the assembled dignitaries, beneath the eyes of all the television cameras and the international audience. I recognized the World Minister of course, who had flown all the way from Geneva, and the Emperor of China, who was standing with his arm around the shoulder of the Dalai Lama. The entire Board of Directors of Japan, as well as the Shogun, stood rigid as bamboo. But I couldn't remember if the goateed man who was crying so hard was the King of Brazil or the Sultan of Persia. . . .

We buried Campbell at the spot near his childhood home that he had chosen, beneath a large tree.

Then, when it was over, I kissed Jean, climbed into my flyer, kicked in the antigrav, and let the autopilot take me home. ♦

# The Triumph of Postmodernism, With Flamingos



## Alexander Jablovok

I'm a martyr. I squat here where she put me. It rains on me, and then the sun dries me, and I still squat here, a decorative little obscenity, waiting for the horses to come. There will never be any horses, of course, but that's not the point. The house is behind me, *my* house. I can't turn around to see it. Hell, I don't want to see the damn thing, but she did something to me, so I'm always looking at it. Visions of it are always in front of me, exploded out in axonometric projection, or shown with cutaway views of the kitchen and the rec room and the basement where they put vinyl paneling and a wet bar with a mirror behind it, or just . . . there, with everything she's inflicted on it. I can't close my eyes, of course, so I just stare at it.

A dog comes up and pisses on me. Its golden urine gleams parabolic in the sunlight, the ribbing of a canine cathedral implicit in its liquid form. Form ever follows function, as the wretched Louis Sullivan said, before they tore all his buildings down, so all of these functionless Baroque and Gothic fancies that I've been having upset me. I'm always thinking about triumphal arches, palaces with plastered facades, colonnades for the processions of princes, fantasies as pointless as they are politically regressive. Still, what I

Illustration by Paul Esquity

wouldn't give to be able to get up from this lawn and build a huge reception hall with cherubs gamboling on the ceiling. Corinthian columns with gilded capitals! A great curving stairway wide enough for women with hoop skirts! I've obviously gone completely bananas. That's fine. I'm not an architect anymore. All I can do is squat here on the lawn, awaiting the inevitable punishments of night.

Before this happened to me, I had a promising career. I was going to write an essay that would make me as an architect. Its title was "Semiotic Repetition and Axiomatic Transferral in the Contradiction of the Postmodern." It was a terrifying title, awesome in its implications. Mere rumors of its existence were causing panic in the upper reaches of the architectural world.

The title is the revolutionary vanguard of the essay, the shock troops of the dialectic. As Marx said . . . but it doesn't matter what Marx said, because *Architectural Record*, as myopic as ever, refused to publish a title without an accompanying essay, as good an example of prior restraint as I know. So, reluctantly, I put my plans for the bus shelter aside. It was going to have a superb purity of line, like Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp, though smaller. The exposed cinderblocks and masses of ferroconcrete would show the postmodernists what architecture really was, but it had to wait. The article came first. Buildings are, after all, merely concrete and glass, but ideas are solid.

But that was when Aunt Theresa decided to die. They found her one day, dead, with a smile on her face. That looked a little frightening, since one of her canines had a ruby chip in it that glinted when she smiled. She was lying spreadeagled on the living room rug with the odd pattern of a five-pointed star woven into it. I'd never liked that rug. Her head was in one of the points, her limbs in the other four. The air smelled sharp, someone said, like ozone, or sulphur, but old ladies use a lot of strange chemicals, and it was probably hair spray, or something for her liver spots.

In her will, she left the house to me, her only nephew.

The house! I had been there often as a child. It was an abomination. It had a Queen Anne floor plan and front elevation, a mansard roof that was straight Second Empire, front woodwork in Shingle style, a sandstone first floor with arches in the manner of Richardsonian Romanesque, and a back addition in Stick—Eastern Stick. The columns on the front porch were Egyptian and the fireplace in the living room looked like a Babylonian ziggurat. The thing made me sick just to look at it. I'd always hated the place, with its dark corners and endless woven carpets. It was so messy. But it was mine now, and I knew what to do with it.

I fell upon that leprous Quasimodo of a building like fire from heaven. I felt ecstasy, as if I were living in the first days of Weimar, when Gropius opened the Bauhaus and, all unknowing, every building already standing became obsolete. I stripped that building of all of its extraneous decoration. I hauled away dumpster after dumpster full of gingerbread, ormolu, crystal, faux marble columns, canopied beds, umbrella stands, Eastlake mirrors, brass spittoons, stained glass. The essential form of the building, trapped inside like an athlete in Victorian drag, began to emerge and breathe.

I broke open the vertical sash windows and replaced them with expanses of sliding glass. I tore out the rugs and covered the wood floors with white lacquer. I removed every door and widened the doorways so that everything was connected in an open plan. It took most of my savings to do it, but it was worth it.

It was amazing, how people used to live. There was a pantry in the kitchen, for example, as well as a marble square for making fudge and a flour bin. They all went, of course. It became a wide area with no countertops and no cabinets to intrude on the kitchen's purity of function. But that pantry. . . . It had preserves in it, and stewed tomatoes, and crystallized ginger. That was normal. It also had jars with newts stuffed into them like frankfurters. There were containers of things that looked like dried eyeballs. The claws of owls. Animal tongues. Foul-smelling greases and oils. Black candles made out of some soft, sticky wax. I hadn't liked eating dinner at Aunt Theresa's when I was a kid. Now I knew that I had been right, despite my mother's lectures about being a polite guest. I threw all that stuff out as well. Perrier and protein supplement was enough for me. I needed the purity of a monk.

During the second week of my purge, I noticed a couple standing on the other side of the street, pointing it out to each other, as if it were something easily overlooked. The woman waved her arms and knocked off her wide, flowered hat. The man wore Bermuda shorts, dark socks, oxfords, and an Atlantic City T-shirt with a picture of a slot machine on it. He took a lot of pictures of the house with one of the three cameras he wore around his neck. I wondered if they were from one of the newspapers, maybe the Sunday magazine section, recording my transformation of the house for an article. They didn't look right, somehow. I ignored them. Let the hoi polloi gawk if they wanted to. I had more important things on my mind.

The outside walls became flat, perfect planes of white stucco, as featureless as movie screens. The railings on the stairs were white tubes. Inside, I exposed plumbing, electrical conduits, heating ducts, the interior of the coat closet, the workings of the toilet. The function of the house was thoroughly revealed. It was the essence of light, brought down from the skies and made geometric. It was purest culmination. Maybe that could be the subject of my article. To hell with bus stops. I was meant for better things.

Aunt Theresa turned out to have been a terrible housekeeper. No surprise there, I suppose. How do you keep a place like that clean? But there was no excuse for some of the things I found, like the trussed-up dead rooster, throat slit, in a bathtub in the closet. Or the . . . stains, on the wallpaper and the ceilings. It all went, the stains along with the elaborately patterned wallpaper under them. The dead toad under the bed went into the dumpster, along with the bed and the bedroom curtains, with their strange symbols and numbers.

Finally, one sunny day, I was almost finished. I stood in the middle of the living room, which was now two stories high, with a sisal mat on the floor. I have never felt so alive as I did at that moment. I had one more thing to do. I had salvaged a finial from the old roof, the Second Empire mansard which had sat on the house like a poorly

fitted toupee. I'd saved the grotesque little foliated copper decoration to keep as a reference, so that the knowing passerby could mentally reconstruct the mess of the old house from this one symbol. Flirting with postmodernism, but I had earned it. I had just decided to support it above the house on a five-foot rod of transparent lucite, illuminated inside by an argon laser, so that it looked sort of like a rocket taking off. That had the additional merit of putting the finial in the same physical space it had occupied when Aunt Theresa had left it, a gesture of supreme cleverness. I was proud of myself.

"God, look at this, Marvin. It looks like an airport." I looked around. It was the woman I had seen in front of the house the week before, wearing green stretch pants with a handkerchief on her head. She wasn't looking at me, but, instead, up at the ceiling. The man in the Bermuda shorts stood next to her, smiling weakly, the only thing I ever saw him do. "Have you ever seen anything like it, Marvin?" she said. "Like a bathroom at a hospital. God, what Theresa would have said. I'm glad she didn't live to see this." She chuckled wickedly. "Of course, if she'd lived, we couldn't be here now, could we, Marvin?"

"No, dear," Marvin said. "Theresa was never very friendly."

"Friendly! That's the understatement of the year. I couldn't get within a mile of this place when it was hers. She had wards and guardians on it like you wouldn't believe, turn your guts inside out if you just thought about violating the boundaries."

"What the hell are you doing in my living room?" I said.

She looked at me, finally, sharp little eyes through sequined harlequin glasses. She wore heavy mascara and long, clogged-up eyelashes. She had a neck like a chicken's, sticking out of her yellow shirt. "Checking over my house," she said.

"Your house?" My voice had the proper tone of cold, slightly lazy architectural contempt.

She nodded. Her cast-iron permanent didn't move a millimeter. "You got it, buster. I'm Alva Biber. This is my husband Marvin." Marvin smiled and nodded like one of those dogs with the bobbing heads you sometimes see in the rear windows of cars, not ones owned by anyone I know. "He installs aboveground swimming pools," she added, as if that made everything clear. "Theresa kept this place locked up as tight as the Temple of Solomon. But you've taken care of that. I've waited years for this."

I picked up the telephone, shaped like a silver prism with buttons on it. It wasn't connected. "Get out of my house," I said, my voice getting a little higher. Something about Alva bothered me. She just stood there, in the middle of my living room, wearing green polyester pants stretched over a fanny the size of the Astrodome, and argued with me, as if I had no idea that this house was mine. She would have made a great modern architect.

"I already told you, it's my house now. And I don't want to tell you again. I tried to take it from Theresa a dozen times, but she was a powerful witch, and the damn style of the place kept me off. She was real smart, the way she did that. The house itself fought me. Every turret, every decorated heating vent. But she had an idiot like you for

a relative. The place would have kept fighting me forever, but you've stripped it of its power."

"You better listen to her, Mister," Marvin said in a reasonable tone. "Once Alva gets her mind set on something, there's no arguing with her."

"Stay out of this, Marvin, will you? It's between me and this numbskull. Eh? I'm being good, you know. I'm letting you get out of here. I don't have to do that. I don't at all. So get a move on, buster."

The time for words was past. I decided to act. I moved towards her, slowly, holding the finial out in front of me. Marvin just blinked like a turtle as I moved closer, but didn't act to defend his wife. Probably just as glad to get rid of her, I figured.

Alva made a gesture with her hands that left a glowing pattern in the air and chanted something in Latin, or maybe Spanish. The finial grew white hot in my hand. I yelped and let go of it. It turned around and bashed me right between the eyes. I knew I should have thrown the damn thing away. The past can turn on you.

When I woke up I was frozen in a squatting position, holding a large ring in my hand. I wore a jockey's uniform. . . . God, it couldn't be. It just couldn't be.

Marvin had already installed an aboveground pool in the back yard, next to a big barbecue. He was back there, cooking hamburgers, wearing a Come 'N' Get it apron. Burgers, a man's job. The house, my house, had been covered by vinyl siding in a kind of off-green color, like something a household disinfectant is supposed to be able to get rid of. There was a golden eagle above the door. The address was written in curlicue letters, with the legend "The Bibers." I knew that every square foot of the floor was covered with acrylic cut pile carpeting, from which the furniture protruded like the flotsam from the sinking of a tramp steamer of Liberian registry. There was a huge color TV in the living room, and a Barcelona lounge made out of Naugahyde. There was even a lava lamp. They must have paid a fortune for it. An antique. The walls had been covered with a textured wallpaper that had pictures of Elvis Presley on it. It was over. All over. This was the fate of modernism. It had destroyed those defenses that Aunt Theresa had worked on so carefully, her gingerbread and her tiles, her hippopotamus umbrella stand with the peacock feathers in it, her wrought-iron fireplace screen. So her old enemy Alva had won. I could hear her in the kitchen, listening to Mantovani and cooking a casserole made out of Campbell's Cream of Chicken Soup, little frankfurters, and chow mein noodles. She muttered under her breath in medieval Latin, occasionally generating little fireballs from her fingertips and flinging them hissing into the soapy dishwater. Above the sink in the orange kitchen was a clock in the shape of a cat, its tail the pendulum, and the big eyes went back and forth as it went tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

So this is where I stay, a little black jockey with a ring in my hand. It's not too bad, really. I see the sun rise and set, and have fantasies of immense hyperdimensional temples to Albert Einstein. It's just that, every night, the pink plastic flamingo on the front lawn stalks over and eats my liver. ♦



# Dawn Over Doldrums

James Sallis

Sitting for coffee, he glances back briefly at the doorway with its improvised deadbolt, chain, deadfall bar. She thinks how the sound of unfastenings has replaced a cock's crow as harbinger of morning for them here, and wonders what Keats might have done with that. She thinks of the boundless symbolism in everything, how the simplest objects and actions are replete with meaning, with resonance: hasp embracing flange, the bar's leap of faith into concavity. Everything connects. Once a poet's wife and ruined by it, she puts coffee down and leans into him, arm resting across, pressing on his shoulder, as her hand lightly grazes his chest.

"How did you sleep?"

"Fairly well," she tells him.

"The first part, anyway."



Illustration by Nicholas Janschigg

"I was restless?"

She nods. Remembers an old poem of David's: All night the beast beat about its room as I lay forgetting you. As usual, David had thought he was writing fantasy—what he lived—and would never know how right he was, how prophetic, all those years ago.

Everything connects.

Now this man's hand still shakes, and she reaches out to steady it. What they drink is a distillate from one of the mancupia's holding-glands, not coffee at all; but as with many things here, they have kept the familiar words.

"Sorry," he says now. Never apologizing for what happens at night (this silence, tacitly, is understood), but, in effect, for needing her now, for this small weakness.

You're simply *away*, he told her once, early on, when some of the others were still with them. Then you come back: walk into an apartment that looks just like your own but where someone else lives. You don't know what has changed, and there's nothing you can take for granted now. Your body fails to do what you expect. You watch your own hand reach out into the world without your willing it.

She gets up and pours more coffee. His hand is steady now. "Hungry?"

"Can we wait?"

"Of course."

She moves closer to him, against him, and his arm goes up over her head (she ducks, readjusts) and behind, to his shoulder. One breast nudges at his palm. She moves until that hand is filled.

\* \* \*

Deep in the evening, shortly after the bolts and locks have fallen, winds begin to gather on the far horizon and blow in across the dry swampland she's taken to calling the Doldrums. It's a silent wind, seen in gentle displacements of grass, felt (but only at its peak) against the face, and for her this wind has become the voice of the mancupia.

One morning long ago she had looked up the word *keening*, simply because the mancupia's brimful, silent faces brought that word to mind. The computer told her: A lamentation for the dead uttered in a loud wailing voice, or sometimes in a wordless cry. Yes.

They'd known something of the mancupia's adaptive gifts from initial reports, of course. The animals could live on almost anything, or (more to the point of what this world offered) on virtually nothing. Only when supplies were exhausted and early survivors scrambled for basics did they begin noticing what a true wonder the mancupia was. For if the mancupia could live on virtually nothing, they discovered, another species could live off the mancupia.

The mancupia had come among them during their first days here, appearing outside the squat-huts one afternoon without fanfare or prologue. After first fearing, then largely ignoring them, the team tried to domesticate them, taking one of the knobby, shapeless animals into the huts where it promptly died, as though to tell them: I will not be kept. More from curiosity and boredom than any other motive, Marc Gavruski, the team biologist and medic, dissected the creature—an autopsy, they eventually took

to calling it. And what he discovered was a machine of exquisite precision. From the rubble and scant, equivocal vegetation of this place, from sunlight and that silent wind and whispers far beyond hearing in the twists and turns of its genetic makeup, the mancupia urged forth the very basics of life, nutrients, water, essential minerals, all of which it stored away in glands easily accessible.

Since that time, they have not seen a mancupia die. Of course, the individuals are indistinguishable one from another, and they assume (since numbers are constant) that periodically one of the animals must wander off to its end to be replaced by another, though they have never witnessed young or any evidence of same.

She must know more about the mancupia than anyone else now, she supposes; must know them better. The work of caring for them, initially shared with others—and now almost the only work remaining—fell to her by degrees, at first because she enjoyed its variance from her mapping and geographical duties and because the mancupia readily accepted her presence, then because, increasingly, there was no one else to involve him or herself with quotidian concerns. Now Eric spends his days hoarded scrivenerlike among the indecipherable artifacts of a long-defunct alien culture. And as the group's number declined, as their reliance on the mancupia redoubled, there seemed always to be more work. The mancupia would no longer graze; soil and vegetation perforce were brought to them. Their exiguous waste products (since almost everything was somehow used, converted) had to be carried off.

Because it is mindless work, though, it is welcome. And maybe, just maybe (she thinks), there is some extreme, innate truth to woman as nurturer, tenuous threads tacking them still to the race's long traditions and history, echoes of whispers in the bright, cluttered spirals of their genes.

Deep in the evening she sits looking out over the Doldrums and feels the wind against her face like a lover's hand. Hears behind her the rattle and drumming of locks, bolts, chains, doors.

\* \* \*

They found Diane one afternoon in the galley, laid out on a long stainless-steel table as though for possible reassembly. Someone—Nyugen, possibly—had gone in to fetch tea and cakes and come back out blanched, gesturing, unable to speak. They were halfway into their fifth month on the world they'd begun calling Catarrh.

Most of her midsection was gone, torn away, scooped out and tossed in gobbets against walls and floor. Her own hand had been forced, up to the wrist, into her mouth, tearing it at both corners into a clown's mouth, rupturing the mandible so that it hung down like a necklace. The fingers of the other hand were neatly severed and laid out in an asterisk at the table's bottom left corner. Bowels, ravelled out like yarn, were a heavy, glistening mound on the floor nearby. An eyeball peered from what remained of her vagina.

They had not known what to do with the body, finally tucking it in a sealed bag meant for geological specimens and depositing it on a rock ledge outside the huts. None

of them could bring himself (though this was protocol) to commit Diane's body to the Deconstructor. In all of them, perhaps, was some vague notion of taking her body home, back to its own planet, for burial.

After a while there was quite a stack of bags on that ledge.

One day (for those, days, had become as indistinguishable as the manuscipia) Evelyn took the Mini out, scooped up the bags in its jaws and hauled them away, out of sight.

A week or so later, she went after them and brought them back.

\* \* \*

More than anything else, he had to *understand*.

To understand this world, at first: sitting before the computer sifting in blocks of seemingly unrelated information, driving headlong (he hoped) for syncretism—much as, ten years old, he had built, on his first computer, a working model of the solar system.

Next he tried to understand what was happening to them here, logging each drift of personality, each storm or withdrawal in those early days, plotting these against every imaginable variable: weather conditions (though there scarcely *was* weather), changing diet and metabolism, declensions of the planet itself, a bevy of biological and psychological tests. What he derived was as intricate, compelling and ultimately useless as that early solar-system model.

Anything was bearable, if only it was understood. But he could not understand a world; and, finally, he could not understand anything of what was happening to them here. None of them could.

So, finally, he came to the Boroch.

They were a race, or species, long extinct, and so little of them remained that surely in short order (he thought) he would know all about the Boroch there was to know. And perhaps, now, he did.

Of a material nature, aside from a handful of scattered small artifacts, there wasn't much. Some concave objects of an extremely hard substance which absorbed all light, ranging in size from that of the ball of a man's thumb to roughly that of a newborn's skull. (Bowls? Or containers of another sort, perhaps. Body decorations. Religious vestments or utensils. Or for that matter—just as easily—a set of measuring spoons.) A few narrow, vertical slabs resembling nothing so much as the gravestones one sees in history books, each of these inscribed with what might be language—or simply attritions of time and weather.

And that was pretty much it. No libraries, no great government repositories, record-houses or munitions dumps, no museums. No buildings at all, in fact, save one. If, indeed, it *was* one. For it might as easily be (and this had become maddening for him) some inscrutable monument or artwork; a train station, vending machine, aquarium.

Five sides, irregular yet still somehow fitting together in a welter of bends and all but imperceptible curves, the whole of the structure perhaps eight feet at its greatest height, five at its lowest, and ten or twelve feet in circumference. It was mostly the color of the drab, surrounding ground itself, save midday when, for a brief moment, light

angled down, caught in it somehow and, pale yellow, spread across its surface, gone then as abruptly as it came. No discernible doors or other egress. But set in each side (each of them, he thought, at a different level) were semi-transparent sections, at times virtually opaque, other times limpid as pool water.

Windows of a sort? Screens?

Periodically manuscipia came to the structure, sat by it unmoving for a few moments or as long as a day, then went on about whatever business they might have, to all appearances wholly unaffected by their tryst.

At first he and Evelyn spent much of their free time observing the manuscipia at this sentry. Drawing close, they would themselves peer by the hour into those watery sections and occasionally see, or believe they saw, vague motions, like movement sensed just outside sight's orbit yet never there when the eye turns to it.

In a notebook whose cover is ringed with layers of overlapping blurred rings, memories of half-drunk cups of coffee in a riot of Venn diagrams, he has copied out, among sketches of artifacts, half-remembered fragments of conversation and markers for the dead (*Jules Yasner*, 5-28?), something from a book he'd read in the drawl of their first weeks when each day, each hour, stretched endlessly to the horizon. Imbedded in a discussion of some French writer he'd never read, or indeed, so much as heard of—in a book like many another, taken up utterly at random—the passage meant little to him at the time, but later, unaccountably, drew him back.

*Rarely do the monuments erected by a culture in its aspirations to eternity betray the forces that propel individuals toward destruction as the affirmative willingness to lose things, meaning, and even self.*

He was remembering that passage when one night, as they stood by the structure, he suddenly said, without thought:

"It was suicide."

And knew he was right.

"Racial suicide. The Boroch simply chose, at last, not to go on. I don't know how I know that, I have nothing to support it—but I know."

"And the manuscipia?"

He paused.

"The manuscipia . . . have been waiting."

\* \* \*

There were five of them. Five of the fourteen who came.

"We should call it the Doldrums," Eric said, looking out across the dry swampland. Of late they'd taken to renaming things. "The land where nothing continues to happen."

"Enough is happening in here to fill a dozen lands," O'Carolyn said. "What does Control say now?"

"What does Control always say?" Solomon stood beside Eric, also looking out. "Run some tests, set up new safety standards, keep us informed, we'll get back to you."

"If this goes on . . ."

"And we have no reason to believe it will do otherwise."

" . . . there won't be any *you* to get back to."

They were all silent a moment.

"It can't be a virus, then."

"Nothing we can detect, at least."

"Or any physical mutation."

"And why only the men?"

"We're a bit closer to beasts to begin with, no?"

"There *are* genetic differences, whether or not it's politically correct to say so, dear."

It was the last of their strategy conferences, brainstorming sessions which had become, in their futility and repetitiveness, little more than ritual.

Lin Fu brought green tea for them all in the tiny enamelled cups he'd packed so carefully among his personal belongings. They had been his grandfather's and father's before him.

"Ceremony is important at such times," Lin Fu said in his quiet voice.

"Especially when there's not a thing else."

That night O' Carolan was killed, and they would hear his harsh, bold voice no more.

Some weeks later, Lin Fu. They found him among his shattered cups.

Then Solomon.

Until there were only the two of them.

"What are you doing?" she had asked Eric the afternoon of the day she found Solomon. He stood by one of the storeroom doors, beside him a cart scattered with small tools, chains, metal fixtures.

"Making my bed," he told her.

\* \* \*

She remembers a story by Gogol, how the texture of the protagonist's world begins to unravel. One morning on the street he observes two dogs conversing quite civilly; before long he's come to believe he's the King of Spain and dates his journal entries "April 43rd, 2000" or "86th Martober, between day and night."

Poetry is nothing, David had always said, if it's not possible.

(The possibility of fantasies at once crueler than truth and more comforting. The blur of words becoming action; action, words. The possibility of protracted, unaccountable absences and sudden rearrivals. Of other, distant, forfeited lives.)

On this world where, employed for their comforting familiarity, gently humorous and wayward as orphans, words seldom mean what they say—Catarrh, Deconstructor, the Doldrums—she does not know any more what is real, or greatly care. That wind at night is real; it must be. The heave and metallic leaf-rattle of lock and chain, that piercing aloneness, the sadness in his eyes (or in her own, perceiving it) come morning. Though she knows, she grants, she allows, she accepts, that date and time, day or night, have little meaning for her now.

She is not altogether surprised then when, one night in the crowded hours before dawn, she looks up to see him there. Not *bim*, really, but what he becomes, something she has never before seen. Behind him, locks lie open and unavailing. Has he sprung them? Or has she somehow forgotten, neglected, to fasten them securely?

"I love you, Eric," she says.

He starts towards her. Not *bim*, she reminds herself; that is not Eric, cannot be Eric, behind those eyes. And for a moment she thinks she sees, she almost sees, the mancuspia's pale, indistinguishable forms there between them in the near-dark. They stand unmoving, as before the structure.

A blink, and they are gone.

Another blink and Eric staggers, comes to a stop, folds slowly, head onto chest, chest onto knees, knees down, onto the floor.

\* \* \*

"You didn't lock the storeroom," he said hours later.

She poured coffee, or whatever it was, for them both.

"I don't know," she said. "I've sat here wondering, waiting for you to surface. I *thought* I had locked it. But it's possible, at some level, that I left things open intentionally. That I wanted you to escape, or—"

"It doesn't matter."

"The *or* matters."

"No. It doesn't."

He reached across the table and put his hand atop hers. "The mancuspia will not let us die, Evelyn. I understand that now."

He smiled.

"They and the Boroch must have lived in a near-perfect symbiosis. The Boroch had no factories, no food-processing plants, no centers of government because they had no use for them; the mancuspia provided everything they needed. And when the Boroch decided, collectively, to end, the mancuspia chose *not* to. We're their answer, their means for going on. All along we thought we were using the mancuspia—and they've been using us."

"But what of all that's happened here?"

"It had nothing to do with the mancuspia. For all they knew, that was the way we had always lived. But now they know it's not. They stopped me last night. They won't let it happen again. We're too important to them, they've waited too long."

After a while she said, "More coffee?" and he nodded. It was fully light outside, and they sat in the squat-hut looking out at the stack of bags on the ledge, sinking into history and memory, getting ready, like the mancuspia before them, to go on. ♦

# Quoth Ray Bradbury: Thank God for Julie

Julius Schwartz with Elliot S. Maggin

This is a memoir about a friend who, God willing, will still be my friend for many years to come. He is also something of a celebrity, and that condition has gotten a bit in the way of our spending more time together. My friend has been with me at some of the pivotal points in my career and my life, and I like to think I've hovered around his as well. But this is less an account of the dates and places that might be significant in an historic sense—though some of them are here—than of the way we've felt when we've been around each other over the past fifty-something years.

The 1941 World Science Fiction Convention was in Denver. Ed Hamilton and I drove out there and then to Los Angeles to meet some writers, touch base with people we had theretofore known mostly by correspondence, and to deliver a check for the first published work of a young man who was the first client I had ever taken on who was not already an established writer.

Los Angeles was home in those days to a loose-knit collection of writers who called themselves the *Mañana* Literary Society. "*Mañana*" from the Spanish, because even when Los Angeles was a small town, the Southern California character had begun to take hold: they'd get the manuscript out tomorrow. They met and hung out at the top of Lookout Mountain in the home of Robert A. Heinlein, who never served booze to his guests. "If I did," Heinlein said, pointing down the mountain at the steep grade and

## Memoirs of a Time Traveller

### Part 3



Los Angeles, 1941: Ray (right) turns over a manuscript to Julie

the hairpin switchbacks, "I could wipe out my competition overnight."

In Denver, where he was the convention's guest of honor, Heinlein had invited Ed and me to the moun-

taintop, and we managed to see him two or three times a week during the month or so we spent in town. After all, when he was in New York he was also an unofficial member of the Steuben Gang.

"I really like you and Ed, and I like having you guys up at the house," Bob said on our third or fourth visit, "but I've got a problem with that noisy kid. He's a loudmouth. He asks too many questions. He always upsets everything. Leave him at home, would you?"

The noisy kid who latched onto Ed and me on that trip was Ray Bradbury, a twenty-one-year-old paperboy who insisted he'd be one of the pros someday. He's still noisy. He still upsets everything. But nobody asks him to stay home any more.

Actually, rather than claim I discovered Ray Bradbury, it is more precise to say he discovered me. In 1939 Sam Moskowitz and several other people, including myself, organized a science fiction convention. The idea was to have a big one in New York in 1939 to take advantage of people wanting to come to town for the World's Fair.

Eventually about two hundred people made it to the convention, a large party really. It was my job to get the pros to show up. Manly Wade Wellman, L. Sprague de Camp, John

W. Campbell, Leo Margulies, Frank Belknap Long, Otto Binder, Otis Adelbert Kline, Jack Williamson and some others turned up at my urging. Also there was this big polar bear of an eighteen-year-old kid named Ray Bradbury who insisted he was a fantasy writer and said he had come all the way from Los Angeles to convince me to be his agent. I still treasure a picture of Ray walking toward the convention with Leo Margulies, followed by Mort Weisinger. Mort would buy his second story, "Gabriel's Horn," for *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. But at the convention I patted Ray on the head—in a figurative sense—as if to say "Yes, yes, my boy," and continued about my business of presiding over the brass at this convention. We had empires to build, after all.

But this blond polar bear kept *nooding* me. After all, as it turned out, he really had huffed across the continent to try to boss his way into my stable. He had nothing to do in New York but needle me. Here's Ray's account:

Forrie [Forest J Ackerman] loaned me \$90.00 which paid for my roundtrip, L.A. to NYC to Waukegan, to Seattle (where I went to tell Hannes Bok [an illustrator friend] I had promoted and sold his artwork to Farnsworth Wright at *Weird Tales*) and down to San Francisco, where I heard Benny Goodman and Lionel Hampton playing together in the open (wonderful) and so home to L.A. I stayed, as you guessed, at the Sloane House (five bucks a week) and it took me more than a year to pay Forrie back at about a buck a week! I was selling newspapers even then, at the corner of Norton and Olympic. Income ten bucks a week or maybe eleven. Then they started changing, rebuilding, widening Olympic which took six months or more and cut into my income which went down to eight or ten bucks a week, just enough to keep me off my parents' backs. Mals were a dime. Some hamburgers a nickel. White Log had a nickel malt! Street car fares were five, seven, and a dime, twenty cents to Venice or Ocean Park.

Ah, God, wonderful. Because why? Because I didn't know I was poor and I had good friends finally, like Forrie, Ed, Leigh, and you. I will never forget . . .

Well, in 1939 I wasn't such a good friend yet. What I ended up telling him to do was send me his short story work as he did it. So he did—once a week—and I would invariably send them back with criticism, mostly of their content. One example had a character whose homosexuality was pivotal to the plot. Alas, this was not a sound commercial move in 1940.

But after not a very long time I started noticing that the writing was rather good. This kid was barely out of his teens and writing prose that rivalled that of the most seasoned wordsmiths in the Steuben Gang.

In 1941, I managed to make Ray's first sale on a 5500-word story called "The Pendulum." Ray had collaborated on it with Henry Hasse, and I pulled in \$27.50 for it. Split with Hasse, less my ten percent, Ray's share of his first sale was \$12.38. Ray had originally written the story for his fan magazine, *Futuria Fantasia*, where it appeared anonymously in the fall of 1939. When it was time to submit it professionally, he asked Hasse to work it over. Fred Pohl believed for a long time he had discovered Ray Bradbury, because he was the editor of a magazine called *Super Science Stories*. As it happens, Fred had resigned as editor just a week before I submitted Ray's first story to that magazine. Alden Norton was the editor who bought that story. Norton and I were sympatico because we were both contract bridge players and we used to soften each other up with bridge talk. *Super Science Stories*, published by Popular Publications, was a low-end market, paying a half-cent per word, but a sale is a sale is a sale. . . .

I had been planning a California trip with Ed Hamilton when I got the word about Ray's first sale. Rather than mail the check, I decided to bring it with me and deliver it in person so I could see Ray's beaming face. What I did was meet Hamilton in Pittsburgh, and we drove west day and night. Hamilton wanted to sell



Ray and Edmond Hamilton give their playful opinions of each other's work.

his car in Los Angeles because, owing to the sparser population in the west, you could get more money for a used car out there. Times change.

Hamilton and I wandered around town a bit before we arranged to stay for about a month in a little cottage on Norton off Olympic Boulevard. Los Angeles was hardly a city at all in those days. It was more a collection of small neighborhoods each with its own character, held together for only practical purposes under a single municipal administration. The morning after the first night we spent there, we walked down the street to find a little breakfast and maybe a newspaper, and there on the corner of Olympic was a young polar bear hawking papers. To our astonishment, it was Ray Bradbury!

I said hello and handed him his check.

Years later somebody showed me that check again: it had been endorsed over to Forrie Ackerman. Evidently Ray didn't have a bank account to cash it in.

We had fun in Los Angeles. Ray would come over in the afternoon after selling papers and ask our opinions on story ideas and things he was in the process of writing. We still have a few memorable pictures we took. There's one of Ray holding a copy of one of Hamilton's "Captain Future" stories and Hamilton holding one of

Ray's manuscripts, and both holding their noses. (*Reproduced on the preceding page.*—Editor.) There is another one Ray took of Hamilton with my arm hanging into the frame: symbolic of the agent's ten per cent. We were a hangout that month for the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, where we would gossip and exchange ideas and stories, and party. Everyone would drink beer except Ray, who stuck to Coke. Now he's in his seventies and he likes wines with unpronounceable names and double vodka martinis. Heinlein's house on the hill was a nicer place from which to watch the view at night. But there was that noisy kid all the time...

Sometime in 1942, because of the dearth of markets for short science fiction and fantasy stories, I persuaded Ray to do a detective-mystery story or two. He sent me "The Long Night," but before I had the chance to submit it anywhere I got a telegram from Ray that said, "Please insert the following paragraph onto the end of my story. I forgot to include the motivation for the crime."

W. Ryerson ("Johnny") Johnson was a script reader for a chain of pulp magazines at Popular Publications. He was also a prolific pulp writer who had ghosted three *Doc Savage* stories and was taking a break from script writing.

I submitted "The Long Night" to my friend Johnny along with a pep talk. Upon my next visit to Popular, Johnny greeted me with a check for \$87.50. He raved about the story—would edit it personally—and asked for more from this Ray Bradbury. Johnny believed for years afterward that he discovered Ray Bradbury. If the people who have on occasion claimed that particular literary distinction ever got together, we could do a pretty credible staging of World War III.

I represented Ray Bradbury the writer—as opposed to the paper boy—for three more years, until I became a comic book editor and gave up Solar Sales Service. I still like to boast that I sold Ray's first seventy stories. By the time he became Don Congdon's client, he was a seasoned professional well on his way to the celebrity that would characterize his

years beyond thirty. He still sends me his published stories and novels to read, even though they are now more a matter of public record than they were when they only appeared in the pulps.

In 1950 Doubleday published Ray's book *The Martian Chronicles*, and he came to New York to meet with his publisher. My wife Jean and I took Ray out to a ritzy steak house called Gallagher's. Ray was, if anything, even more "Hollywood" than he had been before. He did not own a tie. Jean bought him a red one to wear to dinner so he wouldn't look like a haysced. Then again, William Faulkner bought his first suit to accept the Nobel Prize, so maybe Jean wasn't doing him such a tremendous favor. Whenever Ray came to town we would get together for dinner and a show.

On one occasion Jean asked him to dinner at our home in Glen Oaks, Queens, because I wanted to show off our new television set. We had only seen them in store windows and barrooms before we got one. But after dinner, when I rushed to turn on the tube Ray plopped his chair down in front of it, back to it, and declared: "I came here to talk. Not to watch television." I don't remember what the conversation was about. I kept craning my neck to see what Milton Berle was doing. Ray has since been quite critical of television as an institution, including a lengthy and rather well taken article blaming television for the deep recession of the early Nineties.

Ironically enough, Ray has his own show these days, *The Ray Bradbury Theater* on the USA Network, and writes about twenty teleplays a year for it: "The only way I can guarantee the quality," he says.

I visit Los Angeles two or three times a year these days, and now I'm the one who calls up old friends and gathers them for dinner. I make my way west and pull together Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Norman Spinrad, Algis Budrys, Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Gil Kane and whoever else I can entice into some ritzy joint, preferably on somebody's other's expense account. On one occasion Ray came in late, looked around and said,

"Thank God for Julie!" These were all his friends here who he hardly ever sees, he explained. "When you come to town you round us up. So I say, thank God for Julie!"

\* \* \*

With a name that is a calling card in itself and a manner that's larger than life, Ray is one of the few gold-plated celebrities in the science-fiction field. Here's what happens when he goes out in public:

In 1985 I edited and DC Comics released a graphic novel adaptation of Ray's *Frost and Fire*. It had a beautiful quirky cover by Bill Sienkiewicz, the popular comic book illustrator. At the San Diego Comic Convention that year Ray surprised me—and about ten thousand other people—by wandering into the convention hall unannounced and nearly causing a riot. I quickly had an announcement made to the effect that everyone should please let Mr. Bradbury walk through the hucksters' room unmolested, and that he would be sitting at the DC booth for an hour that afternoon and would sign lots of autographs. One of the first of Ray's fans in line for an autograph was Bill Sienkiewicz, eagerly waving a pen and the graphic novel cover he had painted.

At any convention or exposition Ray attended, his ID badge rarely had his real name on it. Usually it bore the name of Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek*. It's such an inside joke that it's pretty much confined to Ray's head. They used to get each other's mail a lot. At a convention once, a bunch of guys accosted Ray for half an hour, berating him about how they did not like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

I was at the Daisy Club in Beverly Hills with Ray, and the actor Frank Gorshin sat having lunch in a far corner. In my sometimes intrusive way I went up to Gorshin and said, "I created you!" Gorshin was a popular mimic at the time, but he was not well known as an actor. In fact, I had helped create the Riddler, the *Batman* character the portrayal of whom had been the breakthrough in Gorshin's acting career.

Gorshin responded gruffly: "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Sorry to word it that way," I said, "but my name is Julie Schwartz and I'm the editor of *Batman*," I told him I was having lunch with Ray Bradbury and asked if he wanted to meet him.

"Oh, yeah," Gorshin responded enthusiastically. And the first thing Gorshin said to Ray was, "I wanted to thank you very much for putting me in that *Star Trek* episode." Even a pro like Gorshin mistook Bradbury for Roddenberry.

We went out to dinner in Los Angeles one August to celebrate Ray's birthday and a bunch of us ordered a big slab of baked Alaska for dessert. Our eyes were bigger than our gullets, and we couldn't finish it. I saw two young couples a few tables away having a good time and I brought the leftover dessert over to them and said, "This is for you, compliments of Ray Bradbury." When I returned to my seat the people at the table stood up and hollered across the restaurant: "Happy birthday, Ray. We're afraid to fly too."

At a rooftop hotel restaurant at a LosCon in Pasadena the waiter came by to ask Ray to speak softly. He's got a voice like a bear too, but the waiter conveyed the message that he was disturbing the people at another table. Lisa Feerick, the advertising coordinator for *Analog* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction* magazines, who was a member of our group, leapt indignantly to her feet and announced to the maître d': "You can't talk to him that way. He's Ray Bradbury!" This seemed to satisfy the restaurant staff as well as the other patrons, and Ray continued his oration.

Bob Kane, the creator of *Batman*, likes to eat at a Sunset Strip restaurant called Mirabelle's. The staff there know him and generally make a suitable fuss when he comes in. At the height of the "Batmania" hype that surrounded the release of the 1989 *Batman* film, Ray wanted to meet Bob, so I took Ray to Bob's favorite restaurant to break some bat-bread. The captain habitually made a big fuss over Bob, but he got so excited over Ray he ignored Bob Kane for the rest of the dinner and just fawned over Ray Bradbury. A waiter was assigned to stand behind Ray during



Photograph by Laker Friends

1981, San Diego: After Ray gives Julie his Inkpot Award, Harlan Ellison takes the stage for another presentation. (See page 63 for the full story.)

dinner and make sure he was satisfied at all times. Bob liked Ray, but he didn't enjoy dinner.

At the Daisy Club I spotted Zsa Zsa Gabor sitting there with her husband, the prince of somethingorother. As is my wont, I went up to her to give her a Superman pin and ask if she would like to meet Ray Bradbury. "Oh, yes," Zsa Zsa said, "I'd like him to write a science-fiction movie for me." She had been in a film called *Queen of the Spaceways* years earlier and it evidently had been fun. She wanted to do it again. Ray just grinned.

And then there was Mikhail Gorbachev. When the last President of the Soviet state came to New York, the two American authors he specified that he wanted to meet were Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury. Evidently Gorbachev's daughter was a big fan. Ray called to tell me he was in town for just a day to give the President an audience, and to apologize for not having time to see me. "How did you get here?" I wanted to know, remembering his aversion to flying.

Ray's attitude toward any vehicular travel has always been curious. He does not drive; always depended on his wife Maggie and others to do that.

For years he did not fly. But offer him a ride in a rocket ship and I think he would have jumped. Once in a while he would fly somewhere, carefully rehearsing with intoxicants that would keep him desensitized during the whole process. But here he was, in New York on a few hours' notice, coherent enough to meet one of the most powerful men on Earth. His answer was simply, "Julie, I'm flying more now and drinking less."

The most recursive star turn a novelist could have is to be a character in someone else's novel, which happened to Ray in Elliot Maggin's Superman novel, *Miracle Monday*, for Warner Books in 1979. As Maggin wrote the story, Superman recalls that as a young teen he was so impressed with a copy of *The Martian Chronicles* that he immediately went to the public library and read everything he could find by or about Ray Bradbury in about two minutes. Then he launched himself off to California to meet Ray, who was so delighted to meet Superboy that the two spent the day together at Disneyland. For Superboy it was his first trip. In response to a copy of the relevant passages in advance of publication Ray



sent me a note for Elliot that said, "Enclosed find *Superman* text unchanged. I am *pleased* to be in this novel."

So now Ray's a character in *my* story, too.

\* \* \*

For a politically aware guy, and a relative liberal, Ray was unusually enamored of the capital engineering that made Disneyland work so well. He was quite friendly with Walt Disney and even urged him—quite seriously—to run for Mayor of Los Angeles at one time. Now that might have changed the history of a lot of places, not only the City of Angels.

Disney gave Ray a lifetime pass to Disneyland, and the two often discussed the feasibility of building a monorail around Los Angeles. In fact, the arm of Disney's organization dedicated to engineering such things still has a standing offer out to bid on the building of a monorail civilian transport system anywhere in the United States. They're anxious to do it, and every once in a while some adventurous politician gets on his hind legs to propose such a project back home. No one has taken it very far yet, but it could happen.

Once when I was at Disneyland with Jean and Ray, Ray got the band on the riverboat to play some dixieland jazz for me. Ray is a fan too. Years earlier I had taken Ray to a dixieland club called Jimmy Ryan's on Fifty-Second Street in New York—which is now called "Swing Alley." Ray was all excited about Georg Brunis, the trombone player. Brunis would play "When the Saints Go Marching In," in the course of which Brunis and his hand would march out of the club playing his trombone, walk across the street to another club, go into the ladies' room and come back in to Ray's.

My copy of Ray's very first book, *Dark Carnival*, has this scrawled next to the title page:

FOR JULIE—

In fond remembrances of Norton Street—"The Piper"—the moon festival in China town—Li'l Ahner—"Are you kidding?" That old song—circa 1941: "Daddy"

—the beach—the burlesque  
—and then New York and  
Georg Brunis—God, what a  
beautiful night!—  
—And because you sold  
almost every story in this  
book for me—  
WITH LUFF  
from  
RAY BRADBURY  
May 10, 1947

In 1981 Shel Dorf, one of the organizers of the San Diego Comic Convention, persuaded Ray to come to San Diego to surprise me as the presenter of the Inkpot Award the convention gave me that year. Jean and I were staying in town near the convention hall, but Jean had difficulty breathing in the hotel. She was in the early stages of emphysema. I told Shel and he quickly arranged for us to move into what is arguably still the best hotel in town, the Westgate. On a hunch I called Ray on the hotel phone. I had no idea whether he was in town, but I knew that if he was, the Westgate is where he would be.

He was. Ray bounded right up to our room but, short-winded, Jean couldn't get up from her seat to greet him. Ray rushed across the room to give her a kiss. It was the start of two years of hardship for Jean and me as her breathing problems got worse and worse. Through it, Ray was a brick, dropping by when he was in town, calling or sending little get-well notes when he wasn't. He treated what would ultimately be Jean's fatal illness as a minor annoyance. One note urged Jean to "behave herself" and stay away from hospitals for a while.

Ray presented my award and spoke graciously. And as I started to leave the stage with my plaque, Ray stopped me to say there was another presentation. Harlan Ellison came bounding onstage waving a sheaf of papers in his hand. Harlan, of the wild demonic eyes and the prose like an angel's, handed me what he said was the *Batman* story he had promised to write for me ten years earlier. I made a big show of it back at my table, waving the "script" around like a Chinese fan, until Harlan tapped me on the shoulder and whispered

that what I had in my hand was only a splash page on top of a pile of blank sheets. Harlan and Ray played that one for the crowd. (See the photo on page 62.—Editor) Five years later Harlan actually did hand in his *Batman* story which appeared in *Detective Comics* number 567, the October, 1986 issue. By then I had retired and the *Batman* editor was Len Wein, but the splash page included the note: "With Love after Fifteen Years, for Julie Schwartz," along with an end note: "A promise finally kept by Harlan Ellison." It was a good story, too.

Jenette Kahn, the president of DC Comics, flew out to San Diego just for the day in 1981 to celebrate my Inkpot Award with a party. I introduced Ray to Jenette and Dick Giordano, the Vice President and Editorial Director, and suggested that DC put out a series of graphic novels adapted from Bradbury stories. They nodded absently, and watched as years later Byron Preiss packaged and published *The Bradbury Chronicles* in comics form for Bantam.

Ray actually enjoys giving out surprise awards and seems to do it every chance he gets. One of the last significant projects I put together as an editor at DC Comics was, in fact, a series of graphic novels composed of stories adapted from various science-fiction writers' stories. These included Ray's *Frost and Fire* project I mentioned earlier. In 1985 Ray and I joined Robert Bloch, Robert Silverberg, Harlan, Arthur Byron Cover and Larry Niven on a panel at LosCon to initiate the series. Ray surprised Bloch on the panel by presenting him with the First Fandom Hall of Fame award from the Australian WorldCon that Bloch couldn't attend that year. A year later, when the WorldCon took place in Atlanta, Ray presented me with the same award.

Soon afterward Greg Bear, the president of the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA), called to tell me that the next Nebula Award Ceremony would include a Grand Master award for Ray, and Greg wanted me to present it. In an old fan magazine DC used to publish in the early Seventies (*The Amazing World of DC Comics*, it was called) Ray had writ-

ten a wonderful little piece about me, about how we had met and the early days of our association. When I heard Greg introduce me as "Julie Schwartz who needs no introduction." I got up and read about Ray what he had written about me:

My memories of Julie Schwartz go back to my late teens when I heard about this mysterious, because far removed in New York City, man who represented some of the best writers in the weird fantasy and science fiction field, was impossible to reach, and would never, never ever in all my life become my personal agent. When I went to New York for the First World Science Fiction Convention, I traveled four days and nights on the Greyhound Bus with my ten dollar typewriter and a copy of *Hartrampf's Vocabulary* under my arm, studying synonyms and antonyms and wondering about the magical names of Leo Margulies and Mort Weisinger and John W. Campbell, and, of course, Julie Schwartz. I felt if I could meet these people one look in my sunburst face would blind them, they would know my talent, grab me, work with me, and we will all be famous together. Of course, that's not what happened. All that happened was that I carried Hannes Bok's paintings and drawings from editor to editor and finally sold him to *Weird Tales*, but in the meantime I kept bugging Julie to become my agent and he looked at my manuscripts and said come back again, later, keep writing, and keep moving, and someday—

Someday. Meanwhile there was the World's Fair on three or four days and nights, most of it spent with Julie Schwartz. If you ask me to pick out some days and nights in my life that are memorable, I would pick two very special occasions. Fourth of July evening in 1939 at the New York World's Fair, and fireworks in the sky and the threat of war in Europe, everything beginning, and everything threatening to end, but being there at the Fair with Julie and

Ross Rocklynne and Charlie Horig, feeling myself among friends who would pet me and bulwark me and encourage me so I could make it through those terrible years ahead somehow. For the first time I had an island to live on, if I had to, and the island was made up of these warm and lovely people.

My second largest memory was a day in the summer of 1941. Julie had finally agreed to represent me and Henry Hasse. We had collaborated on an idea of mine called "The Pendulum." Julie drove to the coast that year with Edmond Hamilton and by a fine coincidence moved into a bungalow court two blocks away from where I sold newspapers on a street corner each afternoon. It was the greatest summer in history because with his arrival, Julie brought the news, the superb surprise, that our story had sold to *Super Science*. The story was published on my twenty-first birthday, August 22, that year. I ran to Julie's apartment with a copy of the magazine and we sat around, Julie and Ed drinking beer and myself downing five or six Cokes, jubilant.

From then on I wrote a story a week, starting on Monday and finishing on Saturday and putting the story into the mail every Saturday night so as to start a new story the next Monday. Late each week, a brief postcard would come back with some terse comment from Julie: "Well done, I'm shooting this straight over to Mary Gnaedinger," or: "This goes to *Weird Tales* tomorrow." Or, on one occasion, God help us: "This reads like a fag Martian story. Don't do this again!"

The last comment was about a story I had written concerning some sort of flower creature on Mars. I blushed furiously, filed the story forever, and, I hope, never committed the same crime.

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A final memory. A Chinese Moon holiday parade in Chinatown, Los Angeles in the summer of 1941 and Bob Hope as Grand Master of the Parade and as Hope passed in his car, Julie yelling: "Are you kidding?!" And Hope looked surprised and laughing a great roar of laughter and pointing at Julie so we all looked and loved him.

So even as Hope pointed to him, I point now, half a lifetime later. He started me on my way, he kept me in good spirits, he sold all of my first stories for me to all the magazines during all those early, lonely years. My debt is immense. My love remembers him.

My only embellishment was, where Ray noted how he drank Coke when we had beer, to say, "My, Ray, how times have changed!"

Ray is a busy guy with a wide and deep collection of friends who he sees not nearly enough. He had been the best man at the wedding of the writers Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett, as well as that of his boyhood friend, Ray Harryhausen the movie special effects pioneer, with whom he had built little model dinosaurs in an old barn. Leigh was one of his oldest friends; he had considered her something of a mentor and teacher when, even before he met Ed and me, he would hang out with her at Muscle Beach and compare stories. He learned quite a bit from her, especially about his detective mystery stories that I occasionally sold in the early Forties.

In their later years Ed and Leigh lived in Palmdale, in the wind-and-quake zone north of Los Angeles. When on one of my trips west I went to visit them I persuaded Ray to come along as a surprise. Ray the native Californian usually wears white socks and white tennis shorts and has a tan. He had an office on Wilshire Boulevard and I saw him standing out front from blocks away as I swung by to pick him up. Leigh did a triple-take when she saw the guy in the Moby Dick outfit get out of the car with me in Palmdale. "Hell!" she said. "I'd recognize Ray anywhere."

To me, Ray isn't the icon he's be-



Photograph by Bob Mankin (L)

Then and now, coast to coast: At left, Ray and Leo Margulies, the editor who bought his second story, in New York in 1939 for the first World Science Fiction convention. (Mort Weisinger is in the background.) At right, Harlan Ellison, Julie Schwartz, and Ray shared stories when they got together in California in November 1991.

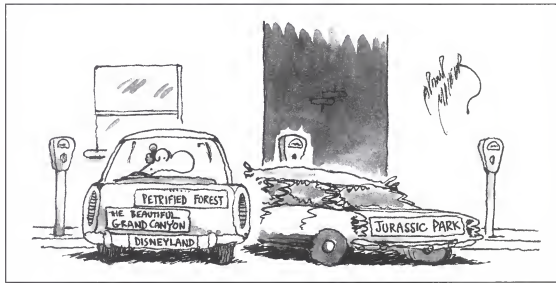
come since we were very young and he lived on the tips from sold newspapers and the pennies I gathered for him in return for the words he wrote. He's just a white-topped, seventy-something version of the boy who loved libraries and dreamed of dinosaurs and crowded his bulky manner into Bob Heinlein's living room.

Maggie likes to tell the story about a day in the late Forties when the two of them came upon the humped back of the abandoned roller coaster

that gathered sand dunes for so many years on Venice Beach and Ray asked her what she thought "that dinosaur" was doing lying in the sand. A few days later he wrote a story for *The Saturday Evening Post* about a love-sick dinosaur who crested the waves off Santa Monica in answer to the belching of a foghorn, then beached himself in despair.

I didn't sell that story, but I like to think I gave him a boost on the way to writing it. It's the one that attract-

ed the attention of John Huston, that prompted the director to ask Ray to write the screenplay for *Moby Dick*. It's the story that made Ray a star, and that is a good thing. There is no better metaphor for Ray Bradbury than that dinosaur: preternaturally imposing, curious as a child, eternally striving from the depths of his soul to share the love he has grown for the things of his life. ♦



# Astronomical Catastrophes

Stephen L. Gillett

"Mother" Earth isn't very maternal, as I've described in a previous column ("Catastrophes of the Past," December 1991). But Earth's astronomical environment can be pretty dangerous, too. Everyone by now has heard of catastrophic impacts and the extinctions they may have caused. But they're not the only astronomical hazards the Earth is subject to.

One possibility is a solar megafare: a great burst of heat, light, and high-energy charged particles from the Sun. Larry Niven's classic story "Incandescent Moon" used this idea—the flare crisped the daytime side of the Earth. Ben Bova wrote an entire novel (*Test of Fire*) using this scenario, with the added wrinkle that the flare triggered a nuclear war because it was (reasonably?) misinterpreted as a nuclear attack. And I think the idea's been used elsewhere, too.

A flare so hot as to burn vegetation—not to mention glassify surface rocks—isn't very likely, because we see no evidence of such a thing in the geologic record. (A thin layer formed by a glassed-over desert, such as the cooked Sahara sands in Bova's novel, would make a distinctive horizon indeed in the sedimentary record.)

Still, a megafare could cause major havoc even if it didn't completely cook the dayside. For one thing, it might cause a mass extinction by killing off lots of critters with hard radiation—radiation, such as secondary X-rays, created when multiple trillions of high-energy protons slam into atmospheric nuclei.

The megafare could especially cause havoc if it happened to hit during a geomagnetic reversal. Normally, the Earth's magnetic field helps shield low latitudes by funneling high-energy charged particles, such as protons, onto the poles. However, every once in a while the Earth's magnetic poles reverse—the south pole becomes the north pole, and conversely. The Earth doesn't turn over; all that happens is the main field dies away briefly (geologically speaking!)—it seems to take about 10,000 years; and when it builds up again, it can just as easily have the opposite polarity.

During the interregnum of the reversal itself, though, the intensity of the magnetic field is maybe only 10% of normal. That might make a big difference, at least to the tropics, if a big slug of ionizing radiation happened to strike the Earth right then. (High-energy radiation is often called "ionizing" radiation because it has enough energy to tear electrons off atoms—that is, to make ions.)

Even lesser flares might heighten the mutation rate by spraying Earth with subatomic particles. Of course, one such relatively low-level flare probably wouldn't have much effect. You'd have to keep irradiating the biosphere, for at least a few years, to have any effect. So we'd now be talking about not just one large flare, but an ongoing series of flares, presumably from unusual solar activity.

Heightened levels of ionizing radiation from such activity might drasti-

cally affect the biosphere even if none of it reaches the Earth's surface. How? By destruction of the ozone layer. As the radiation is absorbed in the upper atmosphere, it will break up oxygen ( $O_2$ ) and nitrogen ( $N_2$ ) molecules into free atoms. Some of these will then combine into nitrogen oxides, which are extremely good at causing ozone destruction. (Before man-made chlorine compounds got into the upper atmosphere, low levels of natural nitrogen oxides were the main ozone-destroying agent.)

Another astronomical catastrophe would be a nearby supernova. Just from the roll of the dice, this *has* to have happened a time or two, and such a thing might easily cause extinctions.

Obviously, if the explosion were close enough, showers of subatomic particles—cosmic rays—streaming from the shattered star could stress the biosphere. Even if the radiation dose was too small to kill many living things outright, it could increase the mutation rate. ("Cosmic rays" is the generic term for all high-energy subatomic particles that stream in from space.)

Poul Anderson treated this scenario fictionally in his story "Supernova" (republished as "Day of Burning"). In his story, the supernova was very close—just a few light-years away—so just shielding the planet from the sheer intensity of the radiation was a severe problem. He also suggested that the additional heat and light from the supernova would

cause climatic disruption. (Since he postulated a technical civilization on the planet, Anderson also noted that the nuclear fallout from the explosion—the intense rain of cosmic rays sprayed out—would present an extra hazard: electronics are even more vulnerable to such things than are biosystems.)

Poul didn't mention destruction of the ozone layer, though, which in retrospect would be one of the major concerns in shielding a living planet. Obviously, the same mechanisms for destroying ozone will work whether the high-energy particles are coming from a planet's own star or from a supernova.

Equally obviously, this means a supernova doesn't have to be so close to have a severe impact on a biosphere. It's been calculated that even a supernova 10 parsecs away—over 30 light-years—could clobber enough ozone to cause a major extinction. (How bright would a supernova 10 parsecs away be? Several hundred times the brightness of the full Moon, assuming the peak luminosity of the supernova is about a billion times the Sun's. It would be *bright*.)

All right, so it's a roll of the dice, but—if you were a galactic insurer—how often would you expect a supernova to pop off within 10 parsecs of an "insured" planet?

One group of scientists suggested that a nearby supernova would be very rare event—maybe less than one in a billion years. This probably isn't correct, though, because they assumed that supernovae are uniformly distributed, on average, throughout the disk of the Galaxy.

And they're not. Supernovae are concentrated in the Galaxy's spiral arms, and indeed in and around the giant molecular clouds (GMCs) from which stars condense (see last issue's column). This, of course, is hardly a coincidence. The massive stars that wind up as supernovae are so short-lived they don't get a chance to move out of the GMC from which they were spawned before they blow up.

Now, our Sun, in its leisurely, 230-odd-million-year orbit around the galactic center, obviously has to pass through the spiral arms once in a while. Thus it runs a gauntlet where

there's a much higher chance of a nearby giant star going blooey and ruining the neighborhood. Probably the Sun makes such a passage twice in its orbit, as current thinking seems to be that our Galaxy has two spiral arms wrapped fairly loosely. This means the dangerous times occur about every hundred million years. They also would last for a few million years or so till the Sun finishes going through the arm.

Since the Sun presently isn't near any stars likely to turn supernova, we don't have to make sure our planetary insurance is paid up right now. Someday, though . . .

An explosion in the galactic core is yet another way to boost the cosmic-ray flux—and if the explosion were vast enough, maybe we'd get enough boost to have effects out here, too. (This, of course, is another scenario Niven has used in his "Known Space" series.)

A huge black hole seems to lie at the center of our Galaxy, and enormous gas clouds around the galactic center have been interpreted to be the debris from vast explosions in the galactic core, perhaps caused when a large clot of matter fell into the black hole. Also, some other spiral galaxies seem to have extraordinary violent events occurring in their nuclei. Seyfert galaxies, for example, have extremely bright nuclei but otherwise look like ordinary spiral galaxies. So maybe a "Seyfert phase" is something every spiral galaxy goes through, once in a while, when for some reason all hell breaks loose in its core.

Might such an explosion spray the galactic hinterlands, where we live, with an uncomfortable level of subatomic particles and hard radiation?

One estimate suggests the total energy released by a core explosion as 100 million supernovas. If it all went off at once, that would be 100 times as bright as a supernova only 10 parsecs away—and presumably cause 100 times the problems. (The core is a thousand times farther away than a 10-parsec supernova, so its light drops a millionfold in reaching the Sun; but there was 100 million times as much light to begin with.)

The core can't all go off at once,

though. It's too big. The simplest argument is from light speed; one side of the core can't "know" the other part is exploding until the signal (shock wave?) gets there, and that signal can't travel faster than light. So even if the zone that explodes is a tiny (on galactic scales!) area a few hundred light-years across, the light pulse from it will be spread over a few centuries. Which should make it manageable.

However, an "explosion" is not the only catastrophic event that could emerge from the galactic core. We tend to think of an "explosion" as blowing off matter more or less uniformly in all directions—that is, they're roughly "isotropic." But certain "peculiar" (the astronomers' word for galaxies with unusual features) galaxies have some extremely violent events going on in them that are *not* isotropic. Huge jets of hot, ionized material, in some cases thousands of light-years long, emerge from the cores of some such galaxies. A planet that blundered into such a jet, as its sun followed its orbit in its galaxy, might be in a bad way indeed.

How can such directed jets of hot material occur? One way is for matter to fall into a spinning black hole. The infalling stuff forms a disk around the hole; because of conservation of angular momentum (spin), it can't drop directly in. Similarly, high-energy radiation radiated by the hole, derived from the gravitational energy of the matter dribbling in from the inner part of disk, shoots out along the rotation axes in highly directed beams, like a gigantic firehose.

Such a jet might not have to be galactic-scale to be very dangerous to a living planet, either. David Brin has suggested the following scenario. Maybe the Sun occasionally wanders through an intense beam of radiation from some such object, while both are orbiting the galactic center. Brin estimated the source, if it exists, must be around 2400 parsecs away—which indicates it must be a searing source indeed. (This scenario is pretty speculative, though. The problem is that Brin estimated the distance to this hypothetical object from alleged periodicities in mass extinctions, and those periodicities most probably

don't exist—see my column in the January 1992 issue).

To put it most generally, maybe the cosmic-ray flux varies a *lot*, whether from solar megafares, near-by supernovae or from more exotic reasons such as galactic core explosions or particle jets. But what's less commonly realized is that we can look for records of such variations in cosmic rays in meteorites and Moon rocks. Since such rocks are exposed directly to space, they catch all the cosmic rays that hit them.

These high-energy particles cause nuclear reactions in the rocks, and among other things, they make long-lived radioactive nuclei, which we can measure to determine how long the rock's been near the surface. If the rock is subjected to a steady stream of cosmic rays for a long time, the nuclides created in it will reach a "steady state"; new atoms are being formed as fast as the old ones decay away. If an unusually large number of cosmic rays has hit, though, it will "skew" this signature away from the steady state—and if the skewing is big enough, we'll see it. (Another reason to study rocks from the surfaces of airless bodies . . . time to go back to the Moon!)

What other galactic hazards might there be? Some scientists have speculated that it could be dicey on Earth when the Sun passes through one of those giant molecular clouds, even if no supernova happens to pop off in the vicinity. Perhaps cloud material could decrease sunlight enough to cause an Ice Age; and conceivably it might add enough mass to Earth's atmosphere to affect its composition, perhaps adversely. (Echoes of *The Black Cloud* by Fred Hoyle!)

This last scenario, though, we probably don't need to worry about. Even the densest such "clouds" are harder vacuums than anything we can make in the laboratory. Thus, it would be hard to gather enough such cloud-stuff together to make any difference to an Earthlike atmosphere. For consider: A typical interstellar cloud may have 100 to 1000 atoms in

every cubic centimeter, and an unusually dense cloud maybe a million. Now, for comparison, a cubic centimeter of sea-level air contains about 20,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms.

Affecting sunlight is more possible. Actually cutting down sunlight intensity significantly with such "interstellar haze" would require an extremely thick cloud. But even a normal cloud may block the solar wind—the continuous stream of charged particles flowing out from the Sun—and that just might (might!) cause climate changes. (Ironic, huh? With the "megafare" scenario, we were looking at the hazards of too much solar wind. But no solar wind at all might also be a problem. As Aristotle said, the golden mean is worth seeking.)

But the biggest hazard from a GMC is surprising: the cloud's sheer mass. This seems bizarre, after I've emphasized how extremely tenuous even such a "thick" cloud is. But a GMC is so vast that even that tiny amount of gas adds up. (The "giant" in their name is not just hyperbole.) How might the mass hurt? Such a cloud can cause gravitational perturbations in far-distant comets and indeed could cause comet showers. This has been suggested as an alternative to the "Nemesis" hypothesis for making comet showers, and thus mass extinctions. ("Nemesis" was a postulated small distant companion star of the Sun that was suggested to periodically disturb far-distant comets.)

Moreover, the Sun doesn't just orbit the center of the Galaxy. It also bobs up and down through the galactic plane while it orbits, like a yo-yo. A full cycle takes about 70 million years, so this means the Sun goes through the middle of the galactic plane every 35 million years or so, and presumably at those times it has a much bigger chance of running into a cloud.

So, some people have looked for 35-ish-million-year periods in things like extinctions and geomagnetic reversals, and some of them even claim to have found such periods. And as

I've indicated, quite a number of people have also tried to connect the Sun's galactic orbit with various geologic-timescale "periodic" phenomena on the Earth. But these scenarios just aren't convincing—at least to this author.

For one thing, phenomena such as glaciations and extinctions are *not* periodic—or at least, if they are you can't show it with the present data. (See my articles of August 1991 and January 1992.) As far as that goes, the Earth by itself has some very long-term periodic cycles. Notably, it has the supercontinent cycle, in which plate tectonics eventually sweeps all the continents together into a supercontinent, only to have the supercontinent fragment again as the pattern of seafloor spreading changes. This leisurely cycle takes about 500 million years—nearly two galactic orbits! And it has a good chance of causing extinctions all by itself—by collapsing ecosystems as a supercontinent is welded together, for example.

For another thing, there are many ways to cause an extinction or a glaciation, and sorting them out isn't trivial. But, then: having a strong random element in natural catastrophes is even even scarier: we can't take comfort from being in the "off" part of the cycle!

The Galaxy is no more benign than is the Earth. Even out here near the Rim, away from the intermittent violence in the core, our little planet is precariously perched.

And at that: despite all their hazards, spiral galaxies are the only likely places for life-bearing planets to arise. Elliptical galaxies are dead: they have no ongoing star formation—and thus, no places where planets rich in heavy elements can form. Irregular galaxies, on the other hand, are probably *too* active: they have too many supernovae, and no nice, stable, long-term (at least billion-year) stellar orbits that stay away from hazardous areas. (At least our Sun's orbit doesn't carry us *through* the core.) ♦

Looking Forward:

# I, Strahd

by P. N. Elrod

Coming in October 1993 from TSR Books

*Introduction by Bill Fawcett*

This novel is the autobiography of the vampire Strahd Von Zarovich. In chillingly normal tones he tells of the pact with Death that was bought with his brother's life, centuries spent searching for his lost love, and the passionate frenzy of his nightly forays. Even readers who never touch horror novels will be entranced by this well-written, action-filled narrative.

In this excerpt we get a glimpse of what life is like at the castle . . . and a hint of what lies beyond.

Sergei's sword came down with deadly speed. I barely blocked it with the flat of my blade and at the last instant, preventing him from chopping me in half the long way.

He was strong but also knew when to break off, which he now did and thus avoided the thrust of my parrying dagger into his guts. He danced back, assumed a guard position I was unfamiliar with, and grinned like a young wolf. A less experienced fighter might have charged in, but I held away, studying him. He was prepared for an upper body attack, but only from the front; the positioning of his feet was too awkward for a really fast turn.

I attacked his left flank, changed it to a feint at the last second, and dived to his right. As I'd hoped, he wasn't able to cover himself. I ducked under his guard, slammed his sword arm back with my own, and stopped with my dagger pressed lightly against the center point of his stomach, just below



Cover art by Clyde Caldwell

his breastbone. A single sharp move would send it right up into his heart.

He saw and grinned again, nodding his surrender. We stepped apart and bowed to one another as the applause began.

*So this is what it's come to, I thought, twenty-five years of training so I can entertain the court peacocks.*

I was being unfair: our audience mostly comprised soldiers who had served with me. Their response rankled because they had probably seen that Sergei's defeat had been a very near thing. I was conscious of my hard breathing and the sweat running from my face like rain. Sergei still looked fairly fresh, and only a few minutes passed before he asked Alek to spar with him next.

His challenge was readily accepted. Alek was lean and fast, but cautious. He refused several openings Sergei offered; their first minute dragged as they tried various feints and dodges on each other. Sergei then tried a feint-feint attack, but Alek read it correctly and countered, working both sword and dagger as the expert he was. In the years since he'd become castle steward, he'd not allowed himself to grow soft. Perhaps there was nothing more for him to do now than to keep the guards in shape and to dally with the chambermaids, but he worked his body in practice combat every day as if his life still depended on it. And it showed.

A lightning quick parry, feint with the dagger, and a return cut—Alek stopped with his blade just touching Sergei's middle.

"I've much to learn," Sergei said, unable to give up his smile.

"You're doing as well as any of my fighters and better than most, my lord."

Judging from the renewed applause, the others agreed with him.

"Perhaps one day I shall be half as good as my brother, and then perhaps I may count myself worthy of being a warrior," he said, bowing to me.

I returned the bow. It was expected of me. As flattering as any of the peacocks, but he'd been sincere. On the other hand, it was easy for me to interpret his true meaning as mockery. Surely he knew just how close he'd come to defeating me. In a few weeks, especially if he took training from Alek, he would be the best fighter in Barovia.

The sparring games had been going on since early morning, and now the sun was just beginning to clear the curtain wall of the courtyard. It was too soon for the midday meal, but I ordered the footmen to have a table loaded with food standing ready. After a series of matches, we were always ravenous. While Sergei and the others reviewed their moves and style, I strolled over and wiped at my sweat with a serving cloth, then eased my thirst with iced wine liberally diluted by water. This high up in the Balinoks, having ice the year round was hardly the luxury it was in the lower, more temperate areas to the south, but I still found it so and enjoyed it.

"My Lord Strahd!" came a woman's voice.

I finished my long drink and handed the cup to a waiting servant. The woman who'd just approached me was not immediately familiar, nor was she dressed for court

show. Her motley clothes were dusty, and her eyes red and swollen from lack of sleep.

"Falow, isn't it?" I vaguely recalled that she'd been one of the many junior lieutenants in my command. Like the rest, she'd been mustered out to either settle in Barovia or return home. From the sheepskin vest she wore over her mail shirt, I concluded she'd chosen to remain in the new land and supervise flocks instead of soldiers.

She bowed. "Yes, my lord. Forgive me for coming unannounced—"

"Never mind that. What's the trouble?"

"Bandits, my lord."

"Bandits. So?" The mountains were full of them. Hardly impressive news. My men often made forays into their strongholds in much the same way the rat catchers worked their trade at the castle. One could never hope to entirely stamp out the vermin, but it reduced their numbers and kept them in line.

"It's a large group, my lord . . . led by Red Lukas."

Now that did catch my attention. The renegade had been a troublemaker for over two years, flouting my laws with his murders and thefts. "You're certain?"

"Aye, my lord. I saw him myself. No one else around here has such a head of hair. Like fire it was."

"Where?"

"Not half a day's ride from here. I have some men keeping him under watch, but we're not enough to attack. We were hoping your lordship could spare some troops to help us take him."

"Take him? I've no intention of releasing troops to take him, Falow—"

Her mouth opened, then snapped shut on whatever protest she might have had.

"But I will go myself to see to his execution."

Her disappointment changed to elation almost as soon as the words left my lips. "Thank you, Lord Strahd." She didn't question whether such a clean-up job was beneath my station, as would some others of the court. Having once been a soldier herself, she could readily understand my interest in running headlong into what promised to be a good fight.

"It's like sending a giant to smash a roach," said Alek when I outlined the situation to him a few minutes later.

"It takes a nimble giant to strike so small a target," I returned. "This is hardly a midsummer flower festival. We're going after Red Lukas."

"Who is he?" asked Sergei.

Alek filled him in on a few details of the bandit's most recent crimes, which included the slaughter of at least fifty people in a farming village. My little brother was righteously horrified and asked to come along. He whooped in a most undignified way when I said yes.

"Do you remember being that eager for blood?" Alek asked as we walked back to the keep to get ready for the expedition.

"I still am, Commander. Can you not tell?"

He glanced at me, his pale, hard eyes going bright with amusement as they locked briefly upon mine. "Yes, my lord. Now that you mention it, I can. Let's hope that Red Lukas has his affairs in order." ♦



# Tomorrow's Books

## October 1993 Releases

Compiled by Susan C. Stone  
and Bill Fawcett

Alice Alfonsi and John Scognamiglio, editors: *Dark Seductions* Zebra Horror, pb orig, 352 pp, \$4.50. Fourteen stories about the dark side of human lust and love, fatal attractions and unearthly obsessions. Stories by Rick Hautala, J. N. Williamson, and others.

Poul Anderson: *There Will Be Time* Tor SF, pb reiss, 192 pp, \$4.99. In this SF classic, Jack Havig can cross the centuries at will, so he sets out to see the world—past, present, and future. But there are others who share the same gift . . . and some of them dream of conquest.

C. Dean Anderson: *I Am Dracula* Zebra Horror, pb orig, 352 pp, \$4.50. A fictional biography of Dracula's history.

Nancy Asire: *Tears of Time* Baen Fantasy, pb orig, 336 pp, \$4.99. Military fantasy about two nearly immortal races at war. A prince must choose whether to use his mind-power to kill, betraying his people's principles, or not to use it and see his people destroyed.

Nancy Asire: *Twilight's Kingdom* Baen Fantasy, pb reiss, 384 pp, \$3.50. Author tie-in reissue.

Michael August: *Scream #2: Deadly Delivery* Z-Wave YA Horror, pb orig, 224 pp, \$3.50. A group of teens form The Terror Club, a mail-order club to create monsters to "dispose" of those they despise. But then the game turns terrifyingly real.



Clive Barker: *The Thief of Always* HarperPaperbacks Horror, 1st time in pb, \$5.99. A ten-year-old boy's innocent search for fun leads him to a magical garden that seems perfect in every way—until the illusion fades, revealing the high price of such perfection.

Clare Bell: *The Jaguar Princess* Tor Fantasy, hc, 448 pp, \$22.95. Epic fantasy about a young woman of the peaceful, magical jaguar-people who is kidnapped and apprenticed to the bloodthirsty Aztec priesthood and leads a revolt to topple the Aztec regime.

Cynthia Blair: *Dark Moon Legacy #1: The Curse* Harper YA Horror, pb orig, \$3.99. Julie thinks she's wanted to know everything about the mysterious guy she's falling in love with . . . but can she deal with the fact that he's a werewolf?

Ben Bova: *Sam Gunn Unlimited* Spectra SF, pb orig, 352 pp, \$5.99. Space adventure about an entrepreneur out to make his fortune exploring and exploiting the Asteroid Belt.

Marion Zimmer Bradley: *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover* DAW Fantasy, pb orig, 352 pp, \$4.99. A collection of stories written by the creator of Darkover, including two never before published.

Lois McMaster Bujold: *The Spirit Ring* Baen Fantasy, 1st time in pb, 384 pp, \$5.99. Fiametta was an unpaid apprentice to her father, a legendary creator of enchanted objects d'art. But when her father's patron is killed, all that can save Fiametta from eternal damnation is her own single magical creation.



Lois McMaster Bujold: *Barravarr* Baen SF, pb reiss, 400 pp, \$4.99. Author tie-in reissue. Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan, legendary commander of the Betan forces, longs for a quiet life. But Cordelia's son will have his own part to play in Barravarr's bloody legacy.

Lois McMaster Bujold: *The Vor Game* Baen SF, pb reiss, 352 pp, \$4.99. Author tie-in reissue. A Miles Vorkosigan story.

Ramsey Campbell: *Waking Nightmares* Tor Horror, 1st time in pb, 288 pp, \$4.99. A collection of short stories by the award-winning horror writer.

Diane Carey: *Star Trek #67: The Great Starship Race* Pocket SF, pb orig, 288 pp, \$5.50. When a new alien race invites spacefarers to send vessels to The Great Starship Race, the *Enterprise* is sent to compete. But fun threatens to turn deadly when the Romulans arrive.

Theodore R. Cogswell and Charles A. Spano, Jr.: *Star Trek: Spock, Messiah!* Bantam SF, pb reiss, 192 pp, \$4.99. An early *Star Trek* novel, back in print after 10 years. A scientific experiment gone wrong sets Spock against the *Enterprise* crew as the messianic leader of a holy war that could destroy the planet Kyrus.

Vincent Courtney: *The Nightmare Club #5: The Room* Z-Wave YA Horror, pb orig, 224 pp, \$3.50. The class clown finds a secret room at the Night Owl Club where the party never stops. But his place of dreams is really a sorcerer's trap for souls that he may never escape.

Bruce Coville: *Aliens At My Home-work* Minstrel Books, YA SF, hc/simulta-

## Key to Abbreviations

**hc**: hardcover, almost always an original publication.

**pb orig**: paperback original, not published previously in any other format.

**pb reiss**: paperback reissue, designating a title that was previously published in paperback but has since been out of print.

**pb rep**: paperback reprint, designating a title that was previously published

in hardcover or trade paperback (sometimes expressed as **1st time in pb**).

**tr pb**: trade paperback, a format using pages larger than a paperback but generally smaller than a hardcover, with a flexible cover.



neous ph orig, 160 pp, \$12.00 hc/\$3.50 ph. Though Rod Allbright doesn't lie, no one believes him when he claims that aliens eat his math homework . . . and no one knows that he's been drafted to help the aliens with their secret mission.

Emily Davenport: *Larissa* Roc SF, ph orig, 256 pp, \$4.99. Larissa had been a professional knife-fighter. Now she is caught up in a war that needs her deadly talents—with enemies on both sides.

Peter David: *Star Trek The Next Generation: Starfleet Academy #2 Line of Fire* Minstrel Books YA SF, ph orig, 128 pp, \$3.50. Worf and his fellow cadets begin their first mission . . . and land in the middle of a Federation-Klingon dispute.

Tom De Haven: *The Last Human* Spectra Fantasy, 1st mass market pb, 288 pp, \$4.99. Conclusion of the *Chronicles of the King's Tramp* trilogy. Just as victory seems assured and Utopia is within reach, the King's Tramp must face one final enemy—the Last Human, whose victory would bring chaos and death.

Debra Doyle & James D. Macdonald: *Bad Blood* Berkley YA Horror, pb orig, 208 pp, \$3.99. Stories told around a campfire are supposed to be scary, so no one believed Jay when he told his wild tale about becoming a werewolf.

David Drake & S. M. Stirling: *The General #4: The Steel* Baen SF, pb orig, 400 pp, \$5.99. Raj Whitehall has been sent to regain lost territories for the Civil Government of Holy Federation, to reverse the fall of Civilization, and to keep the barbarians from taking over . . . but the barbarians aren't cooperating and they outnumber Raj's forces thirty to one.

David Drake & S. M. Stirling: *The General #1: The Forge* Baen SF, pb reiss, 336 pp, \$4.95. Series tie-in reissue.

David Drake & S. M. Stirling: *The General #2: The Hammer* Baen SF, pb reiss, 320 pp, \$4.99. Series tie-in reissue.

David Drake & S. M. Stirling: *The General #3: The Anvil* Baen SF, pb orig, 320 pp, \$4.99. Series tie-in reissue.

Dave Duncan: *The Stricken Field* Del Rey SF, hc, 320 pp, \$19.00. In this sequel to *Upland Outlaws*, a stableboy turned sorcerer-knight gathers conjuring confederates to depose the mad dwarf Zinixo.

Dave Duncan: *Upland Outlaws* Del Rey SF, 1st time in pb, 288 pp, \$5.99. In this sequel to *The Cutting Edge*, the rightful imperor is driven from his throne by the mad dwarf-sorcerer Zinixo.

P. N. Elrod: *I, Strahl* TSR Fantasy, hc, 320 pp, \$16.95. The tragic tale of Strahl von Zarovich, vampire lord of the Dark Domains, told in his own words. A RAVENLOFT™ novel, by the author of *The Vampire Files*.

Rose Estes & E. J. Chervaty: *Iron Dragons: Mountains & Madness* Baen Fantasy, pb orig, 304 pp, \$4.99. When sea dragons menace ships on the high seas, a renegade human magic user and an elven engineer build an Iron Dragon that will run on rails across the as yet unexplored continent and restore trade.

Debra Fowler: *Scream #1: Blood Pact* Z-Wave YA Horror, pb orig, 224 pp, \$3.50. After friends sign a blood pact to protect their favorite hangout, they begin to die and one girl sets out to discover who is killing them before it's her turn.

C. S. Friedman: *When True Night Falls* DAW Fantasy, hc, 496 pp, \$22.00. In this sequel to *Black Sun Rising*, a warrior priest and an immortal sorcerer must renew their uneasy truce to confront and conquer their powerful enemies.

C. S. Friedman: *Black Sun Rising* DAW Fantasy, pb reiss, 592 pp, \$5.99. Series tie-in reissue.

David Gemmell: *Morningstar* Del Rey Fantasy, pb orig, 304 pp, \$5.50. Morningstar the thief was forced to prey only upon wealthy nobles, and willing enough

to become a hero to the oppressed folk of the Agnostian empire. But would gratitude and honor be enough to get the mercenary soldier to lead the revolution against the evil Vampire king?

Steven Gould: *Jumper* Tor SF, 1st time in pb, 352 pp, \$4.99. Davy Rice uses his newfound ability to teleport to escape his abusive father, only to continue his struggle for survival on the dangerous streets of New York where he goes in search of others who can jump like him.

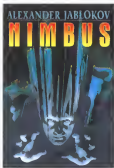
Charles L. Grant, editor: *In the Fog: The Last Chronicle of Greystone Bay* Tor Horror, hc, 304 pp, \$20.95. An anthology of horror stories set in the fictional town of Greystone Bay. Stories by Charles L. Grant, Craig Shaw Gardner, Nancy Holder, Steve Rasnic Tem, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

Laurel K. Hamilton: *Guilt Pleasures* Ace Fantasy, pb orig, 272 pp, \$4.99. Since the Supreme Court gave vampires equal rights, most people have come to think of them as ordinary folks with fangs. Anita Blake, licensed vampire hunter, doesn't buy that . . . until a serial killer starts illegally stalking her prey, and the most powerful bloodsucker in town asks Anita for help.

Harry Harrison & Marvin Minsky: *The Turing Option* Questar SF, 1st time in pb, 416 pp, \$5.99. Harry Harrison collaborated with the former director of MIT's Artificial Intelligence Lab to create this technothriller about a brilliant young scientist, whose breakthrough in AI may cost him his life . . . and his humanity.

Harry Harrison: *Planet of the Damned* Tor SF, pb reiss, 256 pp, \$4.50. Classic SF adventure about the battle to redeem the most hellish planet in the galaxy.

James Neal Harvey: *The Headman* Jove Horror, 1st time in pb, 400 pp, \$4.99. A series of deaths by beheading leads the townsfolk of Braddock to he-



live; they are haunted by the ghost of an executioner from colonial times.

Rick Hautala: *Ghost Light* Zehra Hor-  
ror, pb orig, 512 pp, \$4.99. A madman is  
stalking his children, and no one can save  
them but the ghost of their mother.

Stephen Hawking: *Black Holes and  
Baby Universes and other Essays* Ban-  
tam Nonfiction, hc, 192 pp, \$22.95. A  
new book of essays from the author of *A  
Brief History of Time*.

D. J. Heinrich: *The Fall of Magic* TSR  
Fantasy, ph orig, 320 pp, \$4.95. The young  
knight Johanna seeks to stop a mad mage  
from unleashing a creature that could de-  
stroy all magic in the land—except his  
own! Volume Three of the DUNGEONS &  
DRAGONS™ Penhaligon Trilogy.

Jack Hopkins: *Satellite Night Special*  
Ace SF, pb orig, 240 pp, \$4.99. Funny SF  
about the adventures of an inept inter-  
stellar news team in the 23rd century.

Robert E. Howard & L. Sprague de  
Camp: *Conan #5: The Adventurer* Ace  
Fantasy, pb orig, 224 pp, \$4.50. Conan  
must use his cunning and strength against  
powerful mages in a mountain fortress.

Alexander Jablakov: *Nimbus* Avonova/  
Morrow SF, hc, 384 pp, \$22.00. During  
the Devolution Wars, he'd been a child  
member of a secret government project  
called Nimbus. Now he's a man, musician  
and "morph" artist, in a world where  
faces and personalities can be changed as  
easily as clothing... and someone is  
killing his Nimbus siblings one by one.

Kris Jensen: *Healer* DAW SF, ph orig,  
336 pp, \$3.95. In this third book set on  
the planet Ardel, a human doctor aban-  
dons his post to help the Ardellians  
against a devastating plague.

Kris Jensen: *FreeMaster* DAW SF, pb  
reiss, 288 pp, \$3.95. Series tie-in reissue.

Kris Jensen: *Mentor* DAW SF, pb reiss,  
336 pp, \$4.50. Series tie-in reissue.

Robert Jordan: *The Shadow Rising* Tor

Fantasy, 1st time in pb, 1088 pp, \$5.99. In  
book 4 of *The Wheel of Time*, the Shadow  
is rising to cover humankind, and the  
Lord Dragon considers his next move.

Daniel R. Kems: *Hero* Ace SF, ph orig,  
208 pp, \$4.50. Alien fighter pilot Indiv  
was called a hero for rescuing the com-  
mander of the human squadron he flew  
with. But to his own people, the very same  
actions branded him a monster.

Dean Koonitz: *Dragon Tears* Berkeley  
Horror, 1st time in ph, 416 pp, \$6.99. A  
police officer kills a man to end a murder-  
ous rampage, only to be stalked by some-  
one or something unimaginably terrifying.

Stephen Lawhead: *The Silver Hand:  
Book 2 of The Song of Albion* Avonova  
Fantasy, 1st time in pb, 400 pp, \$4.99.  
When the bard Tegid Tathal chooses Ox-  
ford student Lewis Gillies as the next  
king of Prydain, the deposed Prince Mel-  
dron begins a civil war that threatens  
both this world and the Otherworld.

Richard Christian Matheson: *Created  
By* Bantam Fiction, hc, 336 pp, \$21.95.  
Horror story about a hot young Holly-  
wood writer-producer who creates a vio-  
lent new TV series that gets ratings be-  
yond his wildest dreams. But then life be-  
gins to mimic art and the creator realizes  
his creation has taken on a life of its own.

Anne McCaffrey with Elizabeth Moon  
& Jody Lynn Nye: *The Planet Pirates*  
Baen SF, pb orig, 864 pp, \$12.00. Omnibus  
edition of the three volumes of *The Plan-  
et Pirates: Sassinarak, The Death of Sleep,  
and Generation Warriors*.

Anne McCaffrey & Margaret Ball: *Part-  
nership* Baen SF, pb reiss, \$5.99. Author  
tie-in reissue.

Anne McCaffrey & Mercedes Lackey:  
*The Ship Who Searched* Baen SF, ph  
reiss, \$5.99. Author tie-in reissue.

Dennis L. McKiernan: *Voyage of the  
Fox Rider* Roc Fantasy, simultaneous  
hc/tr pb, 576 pp, \$25.00 hc/\$15.00 tr pb.

Quest fantasy set in the First Age of Mith-  
gar, when a voyage to confront an an-  
cient evil and a dark god began.

Bill Michaels: *Season of the Witch*  
Pinnacle Horror, pb orig, 352 pp, \$4.50.  
A chilling story of two covens of witches  
and their deadly battle of wills.

J. M. Morgan: *Wanted to Rent Z-Wave*  
YA Horror, ph orig, 224 pp, \$3.50. The  
hoarder who rented a room from Chris-  
ty's mother gives her the creeps, espe-  
cially after she finds newspaper clippings  
about a recent murder hidden in his  
room... and a photo of herself.

Andre Norton: *The Mark of the Cat*  
Ace Fantasy, 1st time in pb, 256 pp,  
\$4.99. The murder of the sacred catlike  
kotti who was his only friend was de-  
vastating to Hynkkel. Then his journey into  
the wilderness led him to a trial in the se-  
cret world of the cat—and to his destiny.

J. Calvin Pierce: *The Wizard of Amber-  
mere* Ace Fantasy, ph orig, 240 pp, \$4.99.  
In this conclusion of the *Ambermere*  
trilogy, Marcia gets back from the magical  
realm of Ambermere, but a Demon has  
followed her home, along with Pixies  
and more dangerous creatures, so Mar-  
cia's off to find a Wizard.

Tim Powers: *Last Call* Avonova Fan-  
tasy, 1st time in ph, 544 pp, \$4.99. When  
ex-professional gambler Scott Crane won  
a fortune in a hizzare card game 21 years  
ago, he risked both body and soul. Now  
it's time for the last hand to be played  
and the winner to come to collect.

Katherine Ramsland: *The Vampire  
Companion: The Official Guide to Anne  
Rice's The Vampire Chronicles* Ballantine  
Nonfiction, hc, \$29.95. A guide to the  
world, history, and adventures detailed in  
Anne Rice's bestselling series.

Anne Rice: *The Tale of the Body Thief*  
Ballantine Fiction, 1st time in ph, \$6.99.  
Latest volume in *The Vampire Chronicles*.

Peter L. Rice: *Battletech: Far Country*



FASA/Roc SF, pb orig, 288 pp, \$4.99. In this novel set in the world of the SF role-playing game *Battletech*, Rebel and government forces race to capture a valuable prize of war.

Spider Robinson: *The Callaban Touch* Ace SF, hc, 240 pp, \$18.95. There's a new place in the universe where the old gang can gather—where any beings can come to drink, or talk, or tell their tales. Nobody wants to miss opening night at Mary's Place.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch: *Heart Readers* Roc Fantasy, pb orig, 288 pp, \$4.99. The magic-bonded pairs of Heart Readers had a great gift, to see into a person's soul and nature. And only Heart Readers could choose which of a pair of twin princes would hold the throne.

R. A. Salvatore: *Starless Night* TSR Fantasy, hc, 320 pp, \$16.95. This sequel to *The Legacy* follows dark elf hero Drizzt Do'Urden on his inevitable journey back to the underground land of his birth. The first in a new FORGOTTEN REALMS™ trilogy.

R. A. Salvatore: *The Legacy* TSR Fantasy, 1st time in pb, 368 pp, \$5.95. The first paperback edition of last year's *New York Times* bestselling novel, including a bonus chapter that is not available in the hardcover edition.

R. A. Salvatore: *The Woods Out Back* Ace Fantasy, pb orig, 304 pp, \$4.99. In this first book in a new fantasy adventure series, Gary Leger wished his life was more interesting. But he never expected a walk in the woods would lead him to a realm of elves, dwarfs, dragons... and a legend that could claim his life.

Robert Shekley: *The Alternative Detective Forge Mystery*, hc, 256 pp, \$19.95. The story of an aging ex-hippie turned detective. He just wants to get by... but people keep trying to kill him.

Dan Simmons: *The Hollow Man* Bantam SF, 1st time in pb, 304 pp, \$5.99. A

telepath's journey through the deepest, most private hells of other people's minds leads him through alternate realities and visions of life after death.

Sherwood Smith & Dave Trowbridge: *Ruler of Naught* Tor SF, pb orig, 480 pp, \$4.50. In this sequel to *The Phoenix in Flight*, the sole survivor of a dynastic coup has found safety aboard the Rifter vessel *Telvarna*... as long as the crew believes they can get more for helping him than for turning him in.

Brian Stableford: *The Empire of Fear* Ballantine Horror, 1st time in pb, \$5.99. Alternate history beginning in a 17th-century British Empire where the sun will never rise unless a secret cabal succeeds in its crusade to destroy Richard the Lionheart and his vampire aristocracy.

Roger Stern: *The Death and Life of Superman* Bantam SF, hc, 352 pp, \$19.95. The complete story of the life and death of Superman, to tie in with DC Comics' decision to kill the superhero.

Sheri S. Tepper: *A Plague of Angels* Spectra SF, hc, 384 pp, \$22.95. Epic fantasy about a land where walls of power hold out dragons, ogres and goblins, enigmatic creatures called walkers stalk the land, and an ambitious witch seeks the truth behind myth and prophecy.

Harry Turtledove: *The Guns of the South* Del Rey SF, 1st time in pb, 576 pp, \$5.99. The South wins the Civil War with the aid of AK-47s supplied by time travelers from their future.

Jack Vance: *Planet of Adventure* Tor SF, hc, 544 pp, \$24.96. All four volumes of the classic *Planet of Adventure* saga: *City of the Cbasch*; *Servants of the Wankb*; *The Dindir*; and *The Pnume*.

John Varley: *The Ophiuchi Hotline* Ace SF, pb reiss, 240 pp, \$4.50. The invaders who came to Earth destroyed every evidence of technology. Now some of the humans exited to the moon colo-

nies are experimenting with weapons, intending to fight for their homeworld... at the risk of all humanity.

John Vornholt: *The Fabulist* AvoNova Fantasy, pb orig, 256 pp, \$4.50. The story of Aescop, once an ugly, mute slave whose rescue of a priestess won him a wondrous voice from her goddess. But his divine gift leads him to a destiny even the gods cannot control.

Karl Edward Wagner, editor: *Echoes of Valor II* Tor Fantasy, pb orig, 288 pp, \$3.95. An anthology of classic fantasy adventure stories by Robert E. Howard, Leigh Brackett and Ray Bradbury, Manly Wade Wellman, and C. L. Moore.

Karl Edward Wagner, editor: *The Year's Best Horror Stories XXI* DAW Horror, pb orig, 368 pp, \$5.50. Stories by Ramsey Campbell, Ed Gorman, and others.

Catherine Wells: *The Earth Saver* Del Rey SF, pb orig, 416 pp, \$5.99. In this sequel to *The Earth Is All That Lasts* and *Children of the Earth*, Tana Winthrop, whose new transport technology reopened Earth to the stars, seeks help from a legendary hero.

Michael Whelan: *The Art of Michael Whelan* Bantam Art Book, hc, 208 pp, \$60.00. Full-page color reproductions of more than 100 paintings (including 25 never seen before), each accompanied by an explanatory essay by the artist.

Elizabeth Wiley: *The Well-Favored Man* Tor Fantasy, hc, 448 pp, \$22.95. A first fantasy novel introducing a world where the ruling family is a brilliant, civilized, and occasionally dangerous clan of nearly immortal warriors and magicians.

William F. Wu: *Isaac Asimov's Robots in Time: Warrior* AvoNova SF, pb orig, 272 pp, \$4.99. In this third volume of the *Robots in Time* series, the robot named Hunter and a team of humans search for a robot turned warrior amidst the chaos of the collapse of the Roman Empire.

# The Tarnished Diamond

From the author's forthcoming novel,  
"Inferno: A Chronicle of a Distant World"

Mike Resnick

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years I've written science-fictionalized allegories of the histories of Kenya (*Paradise: A Chronicle of a Distant World*, Tor, 1989) and Zimbabwe (*Purgatory: A Chronicle of a Distant World*, Tor, 1992). When it came time to apply the same methodology to Uganda, I was less concerned with the entire history of the country than with how an ancient, relatively sophisticated, stable society, once considered "the Pearl of Africa" by no less an expert than Winston Churchill, could turn into the charnel house that made headlines all through the 1970s and early 1980s.

Everyone's heard of Idi Amin, of course—and he appears here as Gama Labu. But how many of you know that his two im-

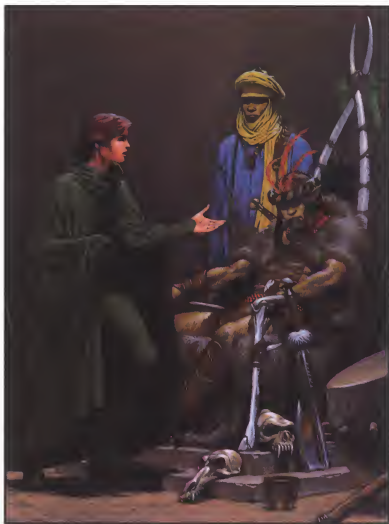


Illustration by Walter Velez

mediate successors, Dr. Milton Obote and General Tito Okello, killed even more of their countrymen than Amin did? What kind of society lines up like sheep to the slaughter, not once, not twice, but three times in succession to strew roses in the paths of the genocidal maniacs who will soon be torturing and killing them?

Well, the requisite conditions don't spring up overnight, and strangely enough, they are usually brought about not by villains but by men of good will. This novella, which forms the opening section of *Inferno: A Chronicle of a Distant World* (Tor, December 1993) attempts to show just how such men, with the best motives possible, made it possible for Amin and his successors to come to power.

Why bother? Well, it is the author's contention that if we can reach the stars, sooner or later we're going to colonize them—and that if we colonize enough of them, we're going to come into conflict with one or more alien cultures. It would be nice if we could learn from our mistakes.

## PROLOGUE

*You wonder how these things happen.*

*You walk down the blood-drenched streets, make your way between the skeletons of burnt-out buildings, try not to stare with ghoulish fascination at the broken bodies littering the landscape, and you keep repeating to yourself: This is not what civilized beings do to each other.*

*You say it again and again, but the reality gives lie to it. This is precisely what civilized beings have done to each other. In fact, it is what they have done to themselves.*

*An infant wbeezes in the shadows. It no longer has the strength to scream. It is half-buried beneath the twisted corpse of its mother, and since you are a doctor, you walk over and tend to it as best you can, but you know it will be dead in another ten minutes, half an hour at most. You estimate that it has been lying beneath its mother's body for two days, possibly three, given the state of its dehydration, and you should be shocked and repelled, but it is nothing compared to the sights you have already seen on this world, this beautiful green and blue planet that once beld such promise.*

*You treat the worst of the infant's wounds, and since you have nothing to feed it, you lift it in your arms and carry it along with you, trying to make its last moments of life minimally more comfortable. Eyes, alien but sentient, peer out at you from behind broken doors and shattered windows. The figure of a looter darts through the shadows, realizes that you have seen it, and vanishes as quickly as it appeared.*

*The other members of your team begin gathering, their faces pale and grim. You bear the bum of a laser rifle a few streets away, then a scream, and then all is silence again.*

*"God!" says your commanding officer, as he rejoins the group. "How did it get this far out of band?"*

*You notice that the infant has died, and you gently place it on the ground, in the shade.*

*"This is not what sentient beings do to one another," you repeat numbly.*

*"The Dlamond of the Outer Frontier," mutters another officer. "Isn't that what they used to call it?"*

*"Once," answers your commanding officer. "A very long time ago."*

*You look up and down the blistered streets of the shattered city and shake your head in puzzlement. They were an ancient and civilized race, the inhabitants of this world. They loved the land, cherished the family, revered life. It has been said that they had codified the laws of their society when Man was still living in caves and hunting his dinner with wooden clubs and stone axes. They had happily joined the community of worlds and willingly vowed to adhere to its principles.*

*So you ask yourself again: How did they get from there to here?*

*And because in your entire experience, you have never seen a charnel house such as this, and devoutly hope never to see one again, you make it your business to find the answer.*

## 1.

Three hundred dead kings waited with eternal patience as the khaki-clad woman approached the enclosure. Six hundred sightless eyes watched as she came to a halt before their successor. A slight breeze caused some of their weapons to rattle, some of their robes to stir, as they stood, silent and unmoving, the harsh sentinels of the current ruler's ancestral court, mute possessors of the accumulated wisdom of their race.

The emperor, his golden fur rippling in the bright sunlight, sat on a tall wooden stool, observing the woman. He displayed no fear, no apprehension, merely curiosity. A withered advisor stood directly behind him, while on each side of him, clad in brilliantly hued ceremonial armor and feathered headdresses, were some fifty warriors, their axes at the ready, motionless as statues. They had formed an aisle for her approach, and now they closed ranks and formed a circle to contain her.

The woman bowed from the waist. The warriors tensed at the sudden motion, but the emperor merely inclined his head slightly.

"I have observed your progress for many hours," he said at last. "Who are you, and why have you come to the land of the Enkoti?"

"My name is Susan Beddoes," answered the woman, "and I come in peace. I carry no weapons."

"I know," he answered. "If you had brought weapons with you, you would not have lived to reach my kingdom." He paused. "Why did your ship land so far away?"

"I did not wish to frighten you."

"We have seen a ship before. It belonged to another, similar to you, but taller, who visited us many years ago." Beddoes nodded. "His name was Wilson McConnell."

"He gave us many gifts."

"I have brought gifts as well. They are in my ship."

"How is it that you speak the language of the Enkoti?"

"I do not speak it," she replied, indicating a tiny device that pressed against her larynx. "What you hear is not my voice, but the voice of the mechanism that translates your words into my language and my words into yours. Though I hope, before long, to be able to converse without it."

"Ah," he said noncommittally.

"You do not seem impressed," said Beddoes.

The emperor shrugged, his golden fur rippling and reflecting the sunlight. "Why should I be? It is just a toy."

"You've seen one before?"

"Yes."

The old advisor leaned forward and whispered something, and the emperor nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Let me tell you this, Susan Beddoes," continued the emperor. "I come from an unbroken line of three hundred sinites, and the most ancient of them had created codes of law and behavior for the Enkoti and imposed order upon our domain when the great river that flows to our west was little more than a stream. Neither I nor my people are children; we will not be treated as such."

"That was never my intention," answered Beddoes.

"I am the Sitate Disanko, the three hundred and first in my dynasty. I will be treated with the respect due my position."

"I meant no offense," said Beddoes. She gestured to the three hundred dead Enkoti, each perfectly preserved. "Are these your forebears?"

"That is correct," Disanko stared at her. "Wilson McConnell told me that you buried your dead in the ground. How can you pay respect to them when their bodies are eaten away by worms and insects?"

"That's a good question," admitted Beddoes.

"Then perhaps you will answer it."

"My race venerates the spirit, rather than the flesh that houses it."

"It is indeed the spirit that sets us above the animals," said Disanko, "but the spirit must have a home, or the Maker of All Things would not have provided each spirit with one."

"An interesting concept," said Beddoes. "I will think upon it."

"McConnell was an explorer, and a mapmaker," said Disanko, seeming to tire of the subject. "Are you also here to make maps?"

"No," she replied. "I am an exoentomologist."

"I do not understand the word."

"An entomologist studies insects," explained Beddoes. "An exoentomologist studies insects that live on worlds other than her own."

"You have come all this way to study insects?" said Disanko with an air of disbelief.

"Yes."

The sitate paused and stared at her through oblique, sky-blue eyes. "There are insects all over the planet. Why have you come to the heart of my kingdom?"

"I will need help with my field work," she replied.

"McConnell's reports say that the Enkoti are the most powerful race on Faligor, so I have sought you out. I am willing to pay for your assistance."

"With what will you pay?"

"I have a line of credit at the Bank of Rockgarden," she replied. "I can pay in credits, New Stalin rubles, Maria Theresa dollars . . ."

Disanko's thin lips pulled back from his teeth in what Beddoes hoped was a smile.

"Wilson McConnell explained money to me when he was here. It is a foolish concept."

"It is a concept that is in practice upon more than fifty thousand worlds," said Beddoes.

"That does not make it less foolish, only more widespread," answered Disanko. "Why should anyone work for something that has no value in itself?"

"It has value to me," she said.

The withered old advisor leaned forward and whispered to Disanko again. The sitate answered, the old advisor shook his head vigorously and said something more, and finally Disanko turned back to Beddoes.

"What have you to trade for our help?" asked the sitate.

Beddoes smiled, relieved. "I have medicines, and machines that will make your work easier. I have translating devices so that you can speak to members of other races. I have mutated seeds that will double your crop production. I have communication devices that will make it unnecessary for you to send a runner from one village to another with messages. I have gadgets that will tell you if there are rocks beneath a field before you break your plows on them." She paused. "I have things you've never dreamed of, Sitate Disanko."

"Do not be so certain that your trinkets are greater than a sitate's dreams," he cautioned her.

"If I have offended you, it is due to my ignorance of your customs, and I beg your forgiveness and understanding," said Beddoes.

"We will eat now," announced Disanko. "Then you will tell me exactly what your work entails, and how many of my people you will require, and for how long, and what you will trade for their services. Then I will consult with my ancestors, and we will eat and sleep again, and tomorrow morning I will give you my answer."

"That will be acceptable," said Beddoes.

Disanko stared at her again. "I do not recall asking if it was acceptable. Your kingdom is many stars distant from here; you are in *my* kingdom now."

Beddoes bowed again. "I must return to my ship to get the goods I wish to trade. I can be back before dark."

"First you will eat with me," said Disanko firmly. "If it requires an extra day for me to make my decision, the insects will still be there."

Beddoes shrugged. "As you wish."

He shook his head. "As I *command*."

"When do we eat?" asked Beddoes.

"Soon," said Disanko. He stood up, and suddenly Beddoes became aware of the sounds of the village, the laughing and playing of children, the comings and goings of laborers, and she realized for the first time that her meeting with the sitate had taken place in total silence. "You may look around first, if you wish," said the sitate.

"Thank you. I'd very much like to."

Disanko summoned one of his warriors. "Her life is your life."

"I don't understand," said Beddoes.

"There are many wild animals beyond our city, and some of them are eaters of flesh. Tubito will protect you, to the point of sacrificing his life, if need be."

"That won't be necessary," said Beddoes.

"Let us hope that it is not necessary," said Disanko.

"He has been a good and loyal servant, and I should be most displeased to lose him."

Beddoes studied the sitate, trying to determine whether he was issuing a threat or merely stating a fact, but his golden face disclosed no emotion, and finally she turned to Tubito, who looked questioningly at Disanko. The sitate nodded, and Tubito bowed and began leading her past Disanko's exquisitely preserved ancestors.

Eventually they reached a major avenue, and she followed him between rows of surprisingly complex wood-and-grass houses. Children came out to stare at her, and she noticed that, now that he was away from Disanko, Tubito's entire demeanor had changed. He smiled, he spoke to the children, he waved to a number of the women who paused to watch them.

Suddenly she was conscious of the pungent odor of animals, and she saw that they were approaching a number of large, meticulously constructed pens that housed the community's meat animals. Laced around the wooden bars were row upon row of thorns, obviously placed there to keep the domestic animals in and the predators out.

"Would you like to walk out beyond the city?" asked Tubito.

"If we have time," answered Beddoes.

"The sitate would not have sent me to accompany you if we did not," replied the Enkoti. He stared at her. "You are a female, are you not?"

"Yes."

"You must come from a very strange land," said Tubito. "Here no female other than his wives may address the sitate, and then never in public—and yet you spoke to him without fear."

"Among my race, males and females are considered equal," answered Beddoes.

"Then the males are the same size as the females?" asked Tubito.

"No, they are larger."

Tubito seemed about to say something, then changed his mind and began leading her around the corrals.

"You wish to ask something?" said Beddoes.

"I am trying to understand," he replied. "But I do not wish to cause offense."

"Ask your question. It won't offend me."

He stopped walking and turned to her. "If males are larger and stronger than females, you cannot defeat them in combat. Therefore, I wonder why they consider you to be their equals." He paused, frowning. "Unless you are stronger, even though they are larger."

"We are not stronger."

"Then . . . ?" He shrugged in puzzlement.

"We are their mental and spiritual equals," said Beddoes.

"And since we have machines to do our work for us, and even fight our wars for us, physical strength is not a measure of worth."

He considered her statement for a long moment. "That is most interesting," he said at last, trying to comprehend a world in which the mental was more highly valued than the physical.

"Surely you have the equivalent among the Enkoti," continued Beddoes. "For example, the old one who whispered to Disanko is weak and frail, but I notice that the sitate values his advice."

"True," admitted Tubito. "But he is the Oracle."

"Can no female become an oracle?"

"No female *has* been one," said Tubito. "But I suppose it is possible. There is old Marapha, who never leaves her house, but forecasts the rains."

"You see?" said Beddoes with a smile. "Perhaps we are not so different after all."

"Perhaps," said Tubito. "I wonder if I might ask you more about your city?"

"If I, in turn, can ask you more about yours," she replied. "For example, how many Enkoti cities are there, and how far does your kingdom extend?"

"If you will climb the highest peak of the Hills of Heaven," answered Tubito, pointing to a mountain range far to the west, "everything that you can see, from there to the Bortai River, belongs to the Enkoti."

They passed a grove of fruit trees. Tubito pulled down a reddish citrus fruit, peeled it with a knife, and handed it to her.

"I don't know if it is safe for me to eat it," said Beddoes.

"McConnell ate them with no ill effects," answered Tubito. "In fact, when he left, he took many of them with him."

She held it up to her face, sniffed at it cautiously, and then took a small bite.

"It's very sweet."

"It gives you strength," said Tubito. He stared at her expectantly.

"I like it."

Tubito seemed relieved, and pulled down two more. One he handed to her, and another he bit into, without removing the outer peel.

"What do your people eat?" he asked.

"A little of everything: meat, fish, birds, vegetables, fruit," she answered.

"And milk?"

"When we are very young."

"We drink milk every day," he said. "It makes us strong."

"I'm sure it does."

"Then why do you drink it only when you are young?"

She tried to explain the concept of vitamins and balanced diets to him, but while he listened politely, she could tell that he understood almost nothing of what she said.

Before long they found themselves in waist-high grass, and Tubito moved in front of her and began walking very slowly, his keen eyes scanning the area.

"What's the matter?" asked Beddoes.

"This is the domain of the Plainstalker, which can kill an animal four times its own size. It is much the same color as the grass, and strikes swiftly and silently. Probably there are none nearby, for otherwise our penned animals



would have scented them and become uneasy, but one cannot take chances with Plainstalkers." He paused and turned to her. "Perhaps you would rather return to the city?"

To continue virtually unarmed in these surroundings would have verged on the suicidal, and while Beddoes carried a molecular imploder that could turn any carnivore to jelly in a fraction of a second, she had no desire to show off the state of her weaponry, so she nodded her acquiescence.

"Perhaps if you stay long enough, you can watch our young warriors embark on a Plainstalker hunt," suggested Tubito.

"Do you hunt them to protect your stock animals?" she asked.

Tubito shook his head. "No male can become an adult without killing a Plainstalker in physical combat."

"I think I might enjoy watching such a hunt," she said. "Speaking of animals, on my walk from my ship to your city, I passed some huge herbivores, standing twice as tall as an Enkoti at the shoulder. I'm surprised they haven't eaten the vegetation down."

"Often they do," answered Tubito. "But then it rains, and everything grows again."

"How often does it rain?"

"Almost every afternoon."

They made their way back to the village through a profusion of flowers, shrubbery and fruit trees. Beddoes stopped twice to admire the colorful avians that flew overhead, and once to examine a small ten-legged purple-and-white insect that Tubito caught for her.

"Thank you," she said as he handed it to her.

"The sitate says you are interested in insects. I am happy to help."

"That was very thoughtful of you."

"I do the sitate's bidding," he answered. "Though I am glad that it makes you happy."

"Tell me about him."

"The sitate?"

"Yes," said Beddoes.

"He has been a good ruler," replied Tubito. "He is firm but compassionate, and the justice he metes out is swift and fair. Under Disanko our kingdom has prospered, and he has actually fought very few wars with our neighbors, preferring to negotiate."

"From a position of strength, of course."

"One cannot negotiate from a position of weakness," said Tubito.

They found Disanko waiting for them, and she was immediately ushered into his dwelling, a multichambered structure that seemed to go on forever. Just when she was wondering where the dining room was, they emerged into a courtyard that was surrounded by thorn fencing, with warriors standing guard every ten feet, and she realized that the tour of the "palace" had been performed simply to impress her.

She was led to one side of a low, hand-carved wooden table, while Disanko stood opposite her.

"Wilson McConnell ate our meat animals when he was here, and suffered no ill effects," announced the sitate.

"Therefore, I assume they will not harm you." He clapped his hands, and two females staggered in bearing a huge tray containing more meat than Beddoes could have eaten in a month. "Please sit down."

Beddoes seated herself on a small stool, much lower than Disanko's, as the females bowed and left.

"You seem uncomfortable," he noted.

"I am," she admitted.

"You may sit on the floor, if you prefer." He paused. "I know you would prefer a higher stool, but there is only one sitate's chair, and no one else may sit upon it."

She considered her options and lowered herself to the floor. Before either she or Disanko could take a bite of anything, one of the warriors stepped forward, pulled out his dagger, and cut off a piece of meat. He chewed it thoroughly, swallowed it, and stepped back to his position against the thorn wall. Then another warrior approached and ate a small purple fruit. This went on until every variety of food had been tasted by one of the warriors.

"A precaution," explained Disanko. "I am not without my enemies, those who wish to become sitate and those who simply wish for any sitate other than myself. I may someday be killed in battle, but at least I know I will not be poisoned."

A colorful avian, about the size of a large crow, flew down from an overhanging branch and perched on the corner of the table. Disanko flipped a piece of fruit onto the ground, and the avian swooped down, grabbed it in its claws, and, screeching happily, flew back to its perch in the tree.

If Beddoes expected to speak to Disanko about her mission or anything else, she was disappointed, for the sitate began eating and never said a word or looked up until he was finished. When he had finished, the tray was taken away, and a lovely young female, just approaching maturity, entered the area and began grooming Disanko's furry face with her fingers. She left a moment later, Disanko stood up, and Beddoes got to her feet.

"You may spend the night in your ship," he announced.

"I thought you wanted me here," she said.

"I did, but the affairs of state intervene. My ambassador has returned from the land of the Traja, and I must confer with him. You will return in the morning, and then we will negotiate for my people's services. Tubito will accompany you."

"I will be happy to have Tubito's company, but if you require him for any other duties, I am quite capable of making my way to my ship on my own."

"When you are in the country of the Enkoti, you are under my protection," said Disanko. "Tubito will accompany you."

The sitate's manner said that the meal and interview were both over, and Beddoes merely bowed and waited for him to leave. Then she stepped outside, where she found Tubito waiting for her.

The trek to her ship took a little more than two hours. They passed numerous herds of herbivores, some huge and ponderous, some small and swift, and once he grabbed her by the shoulder and pointed to a tree limb about a quarter of a mile distant. She saw a flicker of motion, a

flash of crimson skin and brilliant white teeth, and then nothing, as the creature vanished behind some foliage that she would have sworn couldn't have hidden half of it from view.

They crossed the same three streams she had crossed in the morning, each lined with bushes laden with scarlet-and-gold berries, passed a grove of flowering trees, and finally arrived at the ship.

"Will you be going home now?" asked Beddoes.

He shook his head. "I will sleep outside your ship."

"What will you eat?"

He reached into a pouch that was suspended from his waist and pulled out a piece of dried meat, holding it up for her to see.

"If it rains, just open the hatch and make yourself at home."

"That is very kind of you," he replied, "but I am used to rain."

"There's no need to be uncomfortable."

"I appreciate your offer, Susan Beddoes, but I serve the sitate, and the sitate has ordered me to protect you. If danger threatens, it will not come from within your ship."

She entered her ship, going straight to the cargo area to select the gifts and trade items she would bring with her tomorrow. After sorting through them and packing them neatly, she went into the galley, ordered it to prepare dinner for her, and sat down to record her day's activities in her log.

A few hours later, as she prepared to go to sleep in her cabin, the computer informed her that a message was coming in over the subspace radio. She had it transferred to the cabin and sat up.

"Attention, *Crystal Wing*, do you read?" said a masculine voice, crackling with static. "Attention, *Crystal Wing*, do you read?"

"This is the *Crystal Wing*, Susan Beddoes commanding, nine days out of Amazonia, currently at rest on Brazzi II, local name Faligor."

"Good evening, Susan." There was a brief pause. "At least, according to my charts, I *think* it's evening where you are."

"It is, Arthur."

"Well?" asked Arthur Cartright, Assistant Secretary of the Republic's Department of Cartography, which was located on the distant world of Calihan. "What's your first impression?"

"McConnell was right: it's a beautiful world. Temperate, fertile, unpolluted. You get the feeling that you could toss a packet of seeds—any kind of seeds—out the hatch, and by tomorrow morning there'd be a garden in full bloom."

"And the natives?"

"I'd say they're a bit more sophisticated than your run-of-the-mill aboriginals—they're working with metals, and they seem to possess a complex social structure—but technologically they're quite primitive."

"Friendly?"

"They seem to be."

"Better and better," said Cartright. "Any military capability?"

"None that I could see," replied Beddoes. "Of course, we're going under that assumption that the Enkoti are the most advanced of the various tribes, and McConnell could be wrong about that—but they do rule a vast amount of land, and no one seems to be threatening to take it away from them. In fact, the ruler made some reference to meeting his ambassador to some other kingdom."

"Ambassador, eh? They *are* a little more advanced than McConnell's reports would indicate." Cartright cleared his throat. "So much the better. It looks like we chose the right world."

"That's my initial impression," agreed Beddoes. "Of course, we'll need a few more months to be sure."

"We don't have that luxury," replied Cartright. "We're operating on a very tight schedule. I don't know how much longer Breshinsky can hold on to her job at the Department of Alien Affairs, and if Nkomo succeeds her, as seems likely, we're not going to have much time before he decides to call in the Navy. We've opened six mining worlds near Faligor; the Republic desperately needs an agricultural world to supply them. Also, while McConnell's analysis wasn't as thorough as we might have wished, it looks like Faligor has more than its share of gold, silver and fissionable materials, especially in that mountain range to the west of you."

"I thought they were going to let us open this world *our* way," said Beddoes.

"Half the politicians on Deluros don't understand what our function really is," said Cartright, frustration creeping into his voice. "To them, the Department of Cartography is just some huge, overfunded mapmaking institute. They still don't realize that we're the ones who determine how and where Man is to expand in the galaxy, who tell the Navy where to set up its lines of supply and defense. They're already resentful that we determine which planets the Republic assimilates; and now that we're also trying to show them *how*, they're up in arms."

"You'd think after all the messes that Alien Affairs has had to clean up, they'd be thrilled to have someone besides the military open up some worlds."

"I wish it was that simple, but we're invading their turf, so to speak, and when you deal with power brokers of this magnitude there are always problems," said Cartright.

"So what happens next?"

"We speed up our schedule."

"But we'd planned each step so carefully," protested Beddoes.

"Susan, we no longer have the luxury of being as careful as we'd like. I'd hoped to spend ten years carefully assimilating Faligor into the Republic, but I'd say we have three at the outside."

"So it's gone from being our best hope to our last one, right?" said Beddoes bitterly.

"Let's not be negative, Susan. We've learned from our mistakes on Peponi and Lodin XI and Rockgarden. If we didn't think we could do a better job of it, we wouldn't have lobbied for permission." He sighed deeply. "There are two million oxygen worlds yet to be opened up in the galaxy. Our computers tell us that from ten to twelve



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thousand of them will possess sentient life. If we can make Faligor a model of how to assimilate such worlds, maybe we can save some of them—and ourselves—the problems we've caused elsewhere."

"All right," said Beddoes. "What do we do next?"

"I'm dispatching a contact team of two hundred Men to Faligor the day after tomorrow. It will contain the usual—doctors, agricultural experts, geologists, aquaculturalists, everything except military advisors. They'll arrive about ten days from now."

"And what do you want me to do in the meantime?" asked Beddoes.

"Nothing special," replied Cartright. "Learn what you can about their society. Prepare them for our arrival, and see if you can get them to look forward to it with some enthusiasm. Tell them about the wonderful inventions and medicines we're bringing them. In short," he concluded wryly, "just be an exemplary representative of your race. Hell, you can even continue to go around collecting bugs of you want; after all, that's your specialty."

"What do I tell them about the farmland?"

"I don't quite follow you."

"You need a farming planet," Beddoes pointed out. "How much of their land are you going to appropriate?"

"We're not going to appropriate anything. If we have to, we'll find some land no one is living on or working—but I'd much rather try to introduce a monetized economy to Faligor and let the inhabitants sell their produce to the mining worlds." He paused again, then said passionately: "Just this once, we're going to do it right. Man has enough subjects; he needs some partners."

"Will you be coming yourself?" asked Beddoes.

"As soon as I can," answered Cartright. "We're currently engaged in military actions in six different sectors, and the Department of Energy is in urgent need of another dozen mining worlds, and we're only halfway done charting the Albion Cluster. If I'm lucky, I might make it there in about three standard months. Probably four—and that's if nothing else crops up."

"Do you want me to make daily reports until your team arrives?"

"No, I only want you to do it when it's convenient. The last thing we want them to think is that you're sneaking off to the ship each night to plot an invasion. Anything you don't tell me you can tell the team leader."

"All right," said Beddoes. "Is there anything else?"

"No, just do a good job," said Cartright. "There aren't that many Edens in the galaxy, and we've destroyed quite enough of them. It's time we left one intact."

He broke the connection.

## 2.

The contact team landed on schedule. Within a week a vaccination clinic had been set up for the Enkoti, and in a month's time there were more than two dozen other clinics in operation among the Rizzali, the Traja, the Bolimbo, and all the other tribes.

The land proved as fertile as Susan Beddoes had hoped,

and the team appropriated some 30,000 square miles of untilled soil for human farmers. When some of the sitates objected, emissaries were dispatched to make restitution; the Traja and Bolimbo accepted tractors and mutated seeds, but Disanko, who had been studying Men as closely as they had been studying him, insisted upon currency.

Within three months there were tarmac roads connecting the capitals of the major tribes, and some two hundred human teachers were imported to teach both the children and the adults the rudiments of science, mathematics and the Terran language, which was the official language of the Republic and was fast becoming the *lingua franca* of the galaxy.

Then, six months after Beddoes had first landed, a discovery was made that brought Arthur Cartright to Faligor ahead of schedule. He landed at the temporary spaceport, got right into a small airplane, and took off. He returned that evening and immediately summoned a dozen of his most trusted aides to the hastily erected building that momentarily served as humanity's headquarters.

Beddoes was among the invitees, and she filed into a large meeting room along with the other staff members. Cartright was waiting for them, standing stiffly in front of the chairs that had been lined up to face him. He was a tall, lean man, exquisitely dressed, with soft brown eyes and shaggy, unkempt gray-brown eyebrows, an aquiline nose, and a narrow mouth. He seemed uneasy, as if he was more used to doing his business on the vidphone or via subspace radio, as indeed he was. When all of his aides had taken their seats, he cleared his throat and began to speak.

"Before I get to the purpose of this meeting, I want to take this opportunity to tell you that I think you've done an excellent job thus far. We've made far more progress than even I had hoped for."

"The jasons get all the credit for that, sir," said the woman in charge of coordinating the medical efforts. "You couldn't ask for a friendlier, more intelligent, more pliable race to work with."

"Jasons?" repeated Cartright.

She smiled. "That's our name for them. Because of their golden fleeces."

"Very good," said Cartright, returning her smile. "I approve. Unless they object, that is."

"They don't seem to mind it at all."

"Fine." He paused awkwardly. "Anyway, as I said, I think you've all done a remarkable job thus far." He fumbled with his pocket for a moment, then withdrew a hand computer and studied it briefly. "And now for the reason I've called this meeting. As you are aware, we chose Faligor because we knew it to be a rich agricultural world, with an ample water supply, an ideal climate, and a populace that we felt we could work with." He looked at the computer again, then put it back in his pocket. "Well, it turns out that Faligor is even richer than we had anticipated. I have just come back from the mountain range known as the Hills of Heaven, and it appears that they are honeycombed with exceptionally rich veins of gold and silver, as well as a not-inconsiderable supply of fissionable materials. Furthermore, in the desert south and west

of the mountains we have already discovered three diamond pipes, with the possibility of still more to be found."

There was a brief buzz of excitement, and Cartright waited for it to subside.

"This means that Faligor can more than pay its own expenses, right from the start," he continued. "Not only will it be able to export food to the nearby mining worlds, but it may itself become one of the richest mining worlds in this sector. This presents us with enormous opportunities—but it also poses a problem that I wish to discuss with you, and hopefully to resolve before I leave in two days."

"We can't let the Republic in," said Constantine Talat, the burly medic in charge of the Enkoti vaccination program. "You let their miners set foot on Faligor, and within a month we'll have the Navy running the place. They'll conscript the jasons to work in the mines, and it'll be Rockgarden all over again."

"It was never my intention to invite the Republic to Faligor," answered Cartright, his nervousness gone now that he was addressing himself to his specialty. "We have made Faligor a protectorate, not a colony. The Navy will only come in if our people are endangered." He paused. "There is one exception to that. If word gets out about what we've discovered and we are not exploiting the planet's riches to the Republic's satisfaction, then absolutely nothing Cartography can do will prevent them from moving in."

"So what you're saying is that we've got to start working the mines immediately," said Talat.

"I'm saying that *someone* has got to," answered Cartright. "I'm very loath to import human miners, because the Navy will insist on protecting them . . . and they won't need protection unless the Navy shows up and begins flexing its muscles, as it is inclined to do. So my question is this: are the jasons sophisticated enough to work with our mining equipment?"

"Not a chance," answered an educator. "They have no written language, and were even ignorant of the orbit of their planet until we arrived. They're bright, and most of them are eager learners, but it'll be years before they can deal with the computers and sophisticated machinery required for a full-scale mining operation."

"More to the point," added Victoria Domire, the head of the economic team, "none of them except the Enkoti has even the most rudimentary understanding of money. If you plan to work them in the mines, there's no way you can pay them. That means you'll have to conscript them, which is just the kind of situation we want to avoid."

"All right," said Cartright. "Those are pretty much the answers I had anticipated." He looked around the room. "Now, has anyone got any suggestions?"

Beddoes waited until she saw that no one else had any intention of speaking, and then raised her hand.

"The moles," she said.

"I beg your pardon?" said Cartright.

"Moles," she repeated. "I don't know their official name. They're the inhabitants of Socrates IV. Humanoid, oxygen-breathing, assimilated into the Republic for more than two centuries. They're highly skilled laborers who

hire out to any world that can pay them. I ran into a group of them on Alpha Santori II."

"Do they work mines?" asked Victoria Domire.

"That's their specialty," answered Beddoes. "That's why we call them moles: because they spend so much of their time underground."

"We'd need a lot of them," said Domire.

"It's a big planet," said Beddoes.

"I'll take your suggestion under consideration," said Cartright. "In fact, if no one comes up with a better one by morning, I'll almost certainly act on it." He paused. "Now, are there any other questions or problems anyone wishes to discuss with me?"

So many hands arose that Cartright was taken aback. "I think the best way to handle this is for me to meet with each department head in my office. In the meantime, keep up the good work." He turned to Beddoes. "Please come with me, Susan. I'd like to speak to you first."

She followed him out of the meeting room, down a long corridor that led to the office he had commandeered for himself when he first arrived. It contained a desk, a small but powerful computer, and two chairs, as well as a holographic map of Faligor.

"You've spent as much time among the jasons as anyone, Susan," said Cartright. "So tell me—how much resentment will there be if we import, say, fifty thousand moles to work the mines?"

"I don't know," answered Beddoes. "They don't seem to resent *us*, but—"

"But what?"

"But they can see that we're here to help them. I don't know if they'll understand what the moles are here for."

"Do you think that will make a difference?"

"Not at first."

"Then when?" persisted Cartright.

"When they realize that we're shipping valuable materials off their planet and they're not getting any revenues from them."

"That was never my intention. As I said, we need partners, not subjects."

Beddoes sighed deeply. "I don't know that that will make a difference."

"Please elaborate."

"Four months ago these people were living in the stone age . . . or, at best, the bronze age. Suddenly we're educating them and vaccinating them and showing them how to use farm machinery, and that's all well and good, but I think asking them to understand abstracts like a galactic economy and our need for fissionable materials is asking too much too soon. They can understand steel—after all, it makes better spears—but how can they understand the need for diamonds, especially industrial ones? The sates will take our money, since they have no way of knowing which metals are worth money or how to sell them, but eventually they're going to feel that we are somehow betraying them by shipping these materials to *our* people, rather than showing *their* people how to use them and why they're worth so much to us."

"A point well taken," said Cartright. "I can see that we cannot simply turn the mines over to the moles, or any

other race. We'll have to get the jasons to give us some of their people to learn the procedures. Perhaps within a few years we can even have some of them acting in supervisory positions." He paused thoughtfully. "And it might be a good idea to ship the brightest of them to some of the Republic worlds for their education. Not that we won't have fine educational facilities here, but I want them to be able to come back and tell their people about what's out there, who we are, how we function."

Beddoes considered his statement for a moment, then shrugged. "I suppose it could work out," she said without enthusiasm.

"You sound dubious."

"The jasons are a wonderful species," she said. "They're bright, they're industrious, they're intelligent. Eventually I think they can be everything you hope they'll be."

"But?" said Cartright. "There's always a 'but.'"

"But I think you're rushing them."

"We have no choice but to rush them. This world has to serve as a model for assimilation."

"I don't see that moving an entire race out of the bush and into the Galactic Era in one generation makes an ideal model." She paused. "My closest friend among the Enkoti, a warrior named Tubito, attained what I shall call his manhood by killing a huge carnivore with a spear not three years ago. He has many admirable qualities, not the least of which are his curiosity and intelligence, but you can't put him into a tunic and sit him down in front of a computer—no this year, not in ten years, possibly not ever. He could be the Copernicus or Galileo of his race, but he squats outside in the rain and eats strips of dried meat that he rips off with his bare hands."

"But his children can be assimilated as easily as yours or mine could," said Cartright.

"Probably," said Beddoes. "If they grew up in a human household."

"Your doubts are logged and noted," said Cartright.

"But we simply haven't got the time. You've seen what's happened to other worlds when the Republic, with the best of intentions, tried to colonize them. Faligor is our last best chance to prove to them that there's a better way, to show them that the carrot works better than the stick. We're asking a lot of the jasons, I know, but they seem a bright and willing race, and the rewards will be commensurate with their effort. And, of course, the alternative is considerably worse."

"Well," said Beddoes. "You asked for my opinion. I gave it to you."

"And I thank you for it, Susan—and especially for your suggestion about the moles. Now, since I'm here for a limited time, I think I'd better speak with my other experts."

Realizing she had been dismissed, Beddoes got to her feet. She walked to the door, then stopped and turned to Cartright.

"May I make one final suggestion?"

"Certainly."

"I've only counted two alien psychologists among your experts," she said. "If you're going to accelerate the jasons' march to civilization, I'd import a hell of a lot more of them if I were you."

### 3.

Despite all of Susan Beddoes's doubts, Faligor worked.

There was no show of resentment at the importation of some 300,000 moles on long-term mining contracts.

Jason and Man worked side by side in the fields, taming the land and exporting more than enough food in the first six months so that the nearby mining worlds were no longer dependent upon any other source.

The seas proved to be as rich in protein as the soil was in minerals, and before long the fishing and aquaculture industries were also able not just to feed the populace but also to export their products as well.

No less a personage than Johnny Ramsey, the former Secretary of the Republic, went on a hunting safari, spent some time preaching his brand of democracy to the jasons, and solemnly declared that Faligor was the Diamond of the Outer Frontier.

Seventeen Republic worlds planned to open embassies on Faligor, each of them intent upon setting up trade relations with either the miners or the farmers or both.

At Disanko's invitation, Men built the city of Romulus on Enkoti soil, and made it their headquarters. Within a year the neighboring city of Remus was built on the shores of a large inland lake.

When Disanko died suddenly, stricken by a virus, he was succeeded by his son, Tantram, who immediately vowed to work closely with the Republic to bring its benefits to all of his people. His first act was to use the money Disanko had stockpiled to create Tantram University on the outskirts of Romulus, and he established a trust fund that was sufficient to hire the finest human academics to staff it.

Cartright was elated at the way things were progressing, so much so that he purchased a large tract of land from the Rizzali and built a house on it with the intention of retiring to Faligor when his contract with the Department of Cartography expired.

Beddoes herself remained on the planet. When Cartography suggested it was time to move on, she resigned and signed up with one of the local safari companies, which had sprouted like weeds after Ramsey's visit and his subsequent book extolling the virtues of Faligor. She had no interest in or talent for hunting, but she acted as a guide for holo safaris, and spent her spare time pursuing her avocation. During her first two years on Faligor she identified, cataloged, and named more than three thousand species of insect.

She was pleased to see that her passion for entomology, if it didn't exactly infect her fellow Men, at least caused most of them to bring her any insect they hadn't seen before, rather than grind it into the dirt. Once she began naming them after their discoverers, she found to her amusement that her fellow safari guides would bring them to her by the dozens, and would make sure she knew how to spell their names before they left.

Since she still had friends in the Cartography Department, and since Faligor was still in the process of being mapped, she frequently went out with them on their surveys, just for the pleasure of seeing new areas of her adopted world. There were vast flatlands filled with her-

hivores, which had picked up such Terran nicknames as Thunderhulls, Tanbucks, Candystripes, and Skyjumpers. There were impenetrable rain forests, a huge central desert, and a number of mountain ranges, the most impressive of which was the snow-capped Hills of Heaven, the slopes of which were home to huge numbers of primates and avians.

There were some twenty-seven distinct tribes on the planet, all of them living on the one major continent. Each had several subgroups, and it was virtually impossible for any Man or jason to learn more than a handful of the hundred-plus languages, but at various times almost every tribe had been conquered by the now-decimated Maringo tribe, which had fallen upon hard times and numbered less than two thousand members, and most of the tribes spoke some variation of Maringo in addition to their native dialect. The Sitate Tantram decreed that all of his citizens must also learn Terran, and not to be outdone, the sitates of the other tribes followed suit, so that before long there were two planetary languages. Terran became the language of state, used for formal occasions and when dealing with off-worlders, while Maringo was preferred when the jasons spoke informally among themselves.

Within three years there were boreholes in every village, allowing the jasons access to water in times of drought, and modern farming methods had been adopted by all of the jason tribes. Before long huge hotels towered above Romulus and Remus, and hunting concessions were replaced by game parks in order to attract even greater numbers of tourists.

Faligor had come so far so quickly, had adapted itself to Man's vision so completely, that Beddoes found herself half-expecting the planet to be visited by some disaster, if only to chastise Man for his ambition. No world could be this perfect, this tranquil and peaceful, this close to paradise. Oh, to be sure, the Rizzali and Traja had a minor border dispute that erupted into warfare, but when the Republic's representatives moved in to mediate, only eleven jasons had been killed. And a particularly virulent form of skin disease, not totally unlike smallpox, had surfaced among the tribes living on the eastern savannah, but it took the human doctors less than a month to isolate the virus and only another three weeks to come up with a vaccine. Johnny Ramsey came back for two more hunting safaris, accompanied, as always, by two or three dozen members of the press, and word of Faligor spread throughout the galaxy.

It was on Ramsey's final safari that the Sitate Tantram went out hunting with him, and was badly gored by a huge amphibian known as a Riverkiller. The medics managed to save his life, but he became an invalid, and turned over the kingship of his people to his younger brother, a Terranophile who took the name of the Sitate Robert August Tantram II.

The new sitate spoke exquisite Terran, had been schooled on the university planet of Aristotle, had a passion for Terran history, fast vehicles, and human clothing. He built a huge theater in the center of Romulus and imported the finest human stage, opera and ballet companies. He also funded a museum dedicated to works of hu-

man art, and a publishing house committed to translating the oral traditions of the Enkoti into Terran.

He took too many human stimulants, and drove too many fast human vehicles, and looked just a little bit silly wearing formal human clothing, but Emperor Bobby, as the human populace dubbed him, was both popular with his people and a willing co-developer of his world with its human contingent.

He broke with many Enkoti traditions: he no longer held court in the presence of his ancestors, but now presided over the business of his people in an impressive white building he had built for that purpose. He renounced the religion of his people and converted, in quick order, to Christianity, Islam, and was currently a practitioner of the Hindu faith. Though nicotine had no effect whatsoever upon his metabolism, he became a heavy smoker, importing his cigars and cigarettes from distant Antarras.

He staged elaborate entertainments for his retainers and his human friends. One month he would sponsor an imported symphony orchestra, another month there would be a tripodal alien magician from Hesperite III. Once he flew his entire party out to watch the capture of a small herd of Thunderbolls for the zoo world of Serengeti.

The evening that he dropped his homeshell was at another of his many entertainments, this the first boxing match between a jason and a human. He had imported Billy Wycynski, the heavyweight champion of Sirius V, to fight Gama Labu, the huge Rizzali warrior who had thus far beaten all comers.

Susan Beddoes wasn't especially interested in boxing, but one didn't refuse an invitation from Emperor Bobby, so she dressed in what she hoped was an appropriate semi-formal outfit and showed up at the designated time.

About two hundred Men and jasons were there, including Arthur Cartright, who was on a business trip to Faligor, and Beddoes noted with approval that some fifteen or twenty red-skinned moles were also in attendance. Bobby had torn down his brother's former domicile and erected an impressive human-style palace in its place. His three hundred and one ancestors were discreetly hidden from view, as if he considered them an embarrassment. A boxing ring had been constructed in the middle of his newly grown and meticulously cropped lawn, surrounded by perhaps fifty tables, with more than one hundred uniformed jasons serving as waiters and ushers. Off to the left were extensive formal gardens, and just beyond them Beddoes could see some dwellings that had existed when she first arrived among the Enkoti: they were no more squalid or primitive now than then, but they seemed moreso because of their proximity to the sitate's new residence.

"Susan!" said Emperor Bobby when he saw her. "I'm so glad you could come!"

Beddoes was taken aback by his greeting, as she hadn't exchanged twenty sentences with him since he ascended the throne, but he greeted her as if they were close personal friends and rattled on for a few minutes about insects, until his gaze fell upon some other newcomer and he went off to greet him.

She heard a low chuckle behind her, and turned to find herself facing Cartright.



"If he wasn't already the emperor, I'd swear our Bobby was running for office," he said.

"He does tend to overdo it," agreed Susan.

"That's the politician in him," said Cartright, an amused smile on his face. "He's quite something, isn't he?"

"Quite."

Cartright looked over the tables. "There don't seem to be any place cards or seating designations," he noted. "I suspect Bobby must have attended a garden party when he was offworld, and totally forgot how he knew where to sit. Shall we appropriate a table for ourselves?"

Beddoes nodded, and Cartright led her to an empty table.

"I have no idea why I'm here," she said as she sat down.

"I don't know anything about boxing," she said.

"You're here because Bobby likes to impress his human visitors," answered Cartright. "As for boxing, it's really very simple. Two men—or in this case, a man and a jason—get into the ring and try to kill each other."

"I wish he'd invited me to the symphony instead."

"I wish he'd imported someone with poorer credentials than this Wycynski fellow. It would do wonders for the jasons' self-esteem if their boxer could win."

"Maybe he can," said Beddoes without much interest.

"I hear he's good, but he's never faced an opponent of this quality before," said Cartright. "I don't give him much of a chance." He looked off to his right. "Oh-oh. Prepare yourself. It looks like we're to be joined by the royal presence."

Emperor Bobby walked up and seated himself next to them. "I hope you don't mind if I join you?"

"Not at all, your majesty," said Cartright, rising to his feet until Bobby had seated himself. "After all, it's your party."

"A charming expression," said Bobby pleasantly. He paused. "I notice you're not drinking. May I suggest the cognac? It's an excellent label, imported from the Cygni system."

He signaled to a waiter, who approached, opened a bottle, and poured out three glasses.

"To your good health, your majesty," said Cartright, raising his glass.

"I have a better toast," said Bobby, lifting his own glass.

"I should like to hear it," replied Cartright.

"Very well, then," said Bobby. He rose to his feet and waited until he had everyone's attention. "My friends," he said in a loud voice, "I propose a toast: to the swift and happy marriage of Faligor and the Republic."

There was wild applause from the jasons, and more restrained clapping from the humans.

"I beg your pardon, your majesty," said Cartright when Bobby had seated himself once again, "but I don't think I fully understood your toast, Relations between the Republic and Faligor have never been better."

"True," said Bobby. "That is why I think it is time for us to be given full membership."

"You will be, in time," said Cartright. "But let's not rush things."

"Why not?" asked Bobby with a disarming smile.

"I realize it seems an excellent idea to you, your majes-

ty," continued Cartright. "But I urge you to consider your position as a protectorate: you pay no taxes, your people are not conscripted into the military, you receive massive aid, the Republic supports your produce prices..."

"You make it sound like being a protectorate is better than being an equal partner," said Bobby. "Why do I have trouble believing that?"

"Believe me, your majesty, when Faligor is ready to join the Republic, you will be invited and accepted. But your literacy rate is less than fifteen percent, Tantram University will not graduate its first class for two more years, you have only three spaceports, most of your land is still undeveloped. Faligor has made extraordinary progress, but it is not yet ready to compete with the worlds of the Republic on an equal footing."

Bobby smiled. "Then you will help us."

"We are helping you, your majesty," said Cartright. "Faligor has made more progress than anyone had any right to expect. And it will continue to progress."

"Then we should be allowed to join the Republic, and progress under their watchful eye."

"You are progressing under their watchful eye already."

"It is not the same thing."

"Might I ask what has brought about this sudden interest in joining the Republic?" interjected Beddoes. "This is the first any of us has heard of it."

Bobby shrugged. "I went to Sirius V to watch this man Billy Wycynski fight before offering to bring him here. Have you been to Sirius V, Arthur?"

"No."

"Susan?"

"Once, many years ago," she replied.

"It is a huge world," said Bobby. "Far bigger than Faligor. But it has a population of only thirty-five thousand, and it is a full member of the Republic."

"There are reasons," said Cartright.

"I would be pleased if you would tell me what they are."

"Sirius V was one of the very first planets colonized by Man when we went forth into the galaxy. It has been an important shipbuilding and mining world to us for more than a millennium. Furthermore, there are no native inhabitants on Sirius V; it is entirely a human colony."

"There were natives once," noted Bobby ironically.

"That is an unhappy moment in our history. We were terraforming the planet, and did not realize that they were sentient." Cartright paused uncomfortably. "At any rate, the entire population of Sirius V has been human for more than a thousand years now."

"Are you saying no world that is not predominantly human can join the Republic?" asked Bobby. "I happen to know that is not true."

"No, of course I am not saying that. We have made our mistakes in the past, but over the years we have recognized them and rectified most of them. There was a time when worlds were assimilated into the Republic against their will, but that time has thankfully passed. These days, a world must vote to become a member of the Republic."

"I am sure I can convince my people to vote for that."

"Your people are the Enkoti," replied Cartright. "The

entire planet must vote for membership, and most of the people on this planet cannot yet read a ballot. Furthermore, the Republic strongly favors worlds with a planetary government, so they know who they will be dealing with. They don't want to contract for so many tons of grain from the Rizzali, only to find that war has broken out with the Traja and their fields have been burned."

"These are all minor problems, capable of solution," said Bobby. "I suggest that you and I put our heads together and start solving them."

"I repeat," said Cartright. "We *are* solving them, and at an unprecedented pace."

"You see?" said Bobby with a smile. "We have faith in you, Arthur." He looked out across the lawn. "Excuse me for a moment. I see the Ambassador from Lodin XI has just arrived. Time for me to play the obsequious host."

And with that, he arose and walked off to greet his newest guest.

"Well," said Cartright, and then repeated himself: "Well. What do you make of that?"

"You mean his going over to be 'obsequious' to the Lodinite ambassador?" asked Beddoes. "He's just trying to let you know that he's got alternatives. I hear that Lodin XI is about to join the new Association of Worlds that the Canphorites are organizing."

"No," said Cartright impatiently. "I mean what did you think about the rest of what he said? He knows we can't take Faligor into the Republic for decades."

"Of course he knows it, Arthur," said Beddoes.

"Then what was that all about?"

"I think it's obvious," she said. "He knows it's time to start preparing for membership, and he's putting in his bid."

"His bid?"

Beddoes smiled. "You've been dealing in huge problems and theoretical situations for too long. What we have here is a very practical, pragmatic one. You even said it yourself: before Faligor can join the Republic, it's got to have a planetary government. Right now, the Enkoti are the only tribe capable of governing Faligor. Ten or fifteen years from now that might not be so, so he wants to set up the government now."

Cartright frowned. "You're sure that's it?"

"Pretty sure." She paused and watched Emperor Bobby charming the Lodinite and his party. "He's no fool, Arthur. If you offered him full membership tomorrow, I think he'd turn it down. He's just angling for the best possible deal for his people."

"His people being the Enkoti?"

"He considers himself an Enkoti, not a Faligori, and his people have been the dominant tribe for centuries. He just wants to make sure they remain on top."

"Well," said Cartright after some consideration, "he does have a point. The Enkoti *are* the most politically sophisticated tribe on the planet." He paused. "Still, we've got to get them to start thinking of themselves as one people, instead of twenty or thirty different tribes."

"Arthur, they were living in huts less than a decade ago. How long did it take Men to forego their national identities and start thinking of themselves simply as Terrans?"

"We didn't have anyone to help us," answered Cartright defensively. "We had no examples to follow."

"Well," she said with a shrug, "you're the politician. I'm just an entomologist."

"You don't think it can be done?"

"I don't know," said Beddoes. "If you'd told me five years ago that we'd be sipping cognac at a lawn party hosted by a jason, I'd have said you were crazy. They're a remarkable race."

Cartright looked up. "And here comes the most remarkable of them to rejoin us."

Emperor Bobby made his way across the lawn, glad-handing one and all, and finally arrived at their table.

"Well," he said, taking a seat and signaling for another drink. "I hope you're enjoying yourselves."

"We are, your majesty," said Cartright. "We were just discussing the upcoming prizefight."

"Were you indeed?" asked Bobby with a smile that suggested he didn't believe a word of it. "And what are your conclusions?"

"I think your fighter is overmatched."

"It's possible," agreed Bobby. "Actually, I've never seen him fight, but I'm told that he has defeated everyone he's met."

"He hasn't met anyone like Wycynski," said Cartright.

"And do you agree with him, Susan?" asked Bobby.

"I have no opinion."

"Ah. You are not a boxing fan?"

"I've never seen any reason why two people should climb into a ring and try to knock each other senseless."

"But it's not just a matter of strength, but of skill," said Bobby. "The strongest doesn't always win. It is said that a good boxer will always defeat a good puncher. That means the intellect counts for something."

"Always assuming that it's still functioning after the first two blows to the head," responded Beddoes dryly.

Bobby threw back his head and laughed. "Men have such remarkable senses of humor! Is it any wonder that we cherish your company so?"

"Did I say something funny?"

"And such modesty!" added Bobby. "Susan, if you were a jason, I'd be inclined to propose marriage to you."

"Thank you for the compliment, your majesty," said Beddoes, "but you have six wives already, and my race practices monogamy."

"Isn't it Men who say that you can't have too much of a good thing?" asked Bobby, laughing uproariously at his own joke. He was about to say something else when suddenly a uniformed jason put a large Redbison horn to his lips and blew a few blaring notes through it. The assembled guests took their seats and fell silent.

"Ah!" said Bobby excitedly. "The entertainment!"

Billy Wycynski was the first to walk down the make-shift aisle between tables, nodding an occasional greeting to the four or five Men he recognized. His nose and left ear had been surgically reconstructed at various times during his career, but he was missing a number of teeth, and had evidently decided not to have them replaced until his career was over. It could have given him a silly grin, but for some reason the actual effect of his smile was one

of ferocity. He was tall, well muscled, and walked with a fluid grace. Once in the ring, his seconds removed his robe, and he danced lightly around, shadow-boxing and trying to keep loose, as Bobby's human guests cheered and applauded.

A moment later Gama Labu, the Rizzali champion, emerged from his dressing tent, wearing a loose-fitting pair of knee-length shorts and disdaining a robe. Everything about him was big: his head, his neck, his shoulders, his chest, even his belly. His golden fur rippled with every step he took, and his small ears were in constant motion, listening to the comments of the audience as he passed by.

"You should have put him on a diet," remarked Cartright. "He's got to be forty pounds overweight."

"We expect great things of him," said Bobby. "Great things."

He stood and saluted as Labu moved past, and the fighter returned a slovenly salute and a huge grin.

"Well," said Bobby, trying to keep the contempt from his voice, "you can tell by that salute that he's not in the Enkoti army."

"He's a soldier?" asked Cartright.

"A minor officer, so I'm told."

Labu moved ponderously toward the ring. Beddoes could almost imagine the ground trembling beneath his feet, and the thought occurred to her that Emperor Bobby, all protests to the contrary, would not be heartbroken to see the champion of the Rizzali humbled in front of this assemblage. It was not an attitude that was shared by the other jasons in the audience, who roared their approval as Labu shuffled ponderously around the ring, trying to loosen his bulging muscles.

A human referee climbed into the ring, brought the fighters together for their last-minute instructions, then sent them to their corners. Wycynski kept dancing and shadow-boxing, working up a mild sweat, while Labu simply stood in his corner, his arms draped over the ropes, smiling to the some of his Rizzali tribal brothers in the crowd.

Then the bell rang, and Wycynski moved to the center of the ring, bobbing, weaving, jabbing, ducking. Labu seemed to approach him almost in slow motion, and threw a huge roundhouse right. The human segment of the audience gasped, then relaxed as Wycynski ducked it, stepped inside, and threw a flurry of six rights and lefts to the jason's midsection, then danced back out of reach with the Men's cheers ringing in his ears. Labu seemed more surprised than hurt, grinned foolishly at his opponent, and plodded after him. Each time he came within reach, Wycynski moved in quickly, delivered another flurry of punches, and withdrew before Labu could counter.

"They might as well stop it," said Cartright to Bobby. "Your fighter will be lucky to land a punch all night."

The sitate mumbled some answer, but never took his eyes from the ring.

Beddoes was watching the ring, too, and wondered if anyone else saw what she was seeing: that despite the fact that Wycynski was hitting him at will, Gama Labu seemed none the worse for all the punishment he was

taking. He still had that foolish grin on his face, he still pursued his opponent doggedly if not gracefully, he seemed to feel no need to protect himself from the human champion's heaviest blows. And despite all the excess weight he was carrying, he wasn't puffing or gasping for air. *You may not look like much*, thought Beddoes, as the fighters returned to their corners amid much cheering from the humans and almost total silence from the jasons, *but you are one hell of a remarkable specimen.*

By the third round, Labu had convinced himself that his foe could do him no damage, and he walked out to the middle of the ring when the bell rang, spread his arms out, and invited Wycynski to take his best shot. The human looked surprised, but he wasted no time in accepting Labu's offer, and pummeled him for a full thirty seconds, stopping only when Labu broke out in peals of amused laughter, which was suddenly echoed by the jasons in the audience.

And suddenly the nature of the fight changed, for now Labu, who had still not landed a blow, began stalking Wycynski in earnest, and somehow, although he continued to move flat-footed, with his head down and his belly hanging over the elastic band of his shorts, Beddoes began to appreciate that he had a certain alien grace, that a Man moving like this might appear slovenly but that the jason seemed like an engine of destruction, bearing down relentlessly on his opponent. He cut off the ring, backed Wycynski into a corner, and moved in for what everyone in the crowd sensed would be the kill.

Wycynski was a champion, and he fought back like one, but the enormous jason merely shrugged off his blows and began pounding him, a right to the head, a left to the chest, a right to the jaw. With each punch, the jasons cheered wildly and the human's knees buckled more. Finally Labu turned to Emperor Bobby, and offered another clumsy salute, and the crowd, both jason and human, became suddenly silent. For just an instant Beddoes seemed to think he was staring directly at her and Cartright; then he grinned happily, turned back to his opponent, and delivered one final blow to the head. Wycynski collapsed, totally senseless, to the canvas. The jasons, except for Bobby, leaped to their feet as one and applauded. A moment later, led by Cartright, the humans also stood up and clapped their approval, though less enthusiastically. Only the handful of moles, who seem to have taken little or no interest in the bout, remained seated.

After his hand had been raised in victory, Labu was given a microphone to address the crowd. It was announced that he spoke no Terran and would use the Maringo dialect.

"I thank the Enkoti sitate for this opportunity," he said, flashing a huge smile at the crowd, and again Beddoes had the uneasy feeling he was looking in her direction. There was something about it that she found unnerving, something alien that she had never seen in Bobby or even Disanko. "It was fun."

And with that, he returned to his dressing room.

"Well, Susan," said Emperor Bobby, "now that you've seen a boxing match, what did you think of it?"

Beddoes paused for a moment. "I think Gama Labu has a curious sense of fun," she replied at last.

"Well, what can you expect from a Rizzali?" said Bobby with a deprecating shrug. He turned to Cartright. "Arthur, I should have bet you on the outcome."

"It was an impressive demonstration," replied Cartright. "Perhaps we are closer to being your equals than you thought," suggested Bobby with a sly grin.

"Well, you certainly are in the boxing ring," agreed Cartright. "This Labu's like some kind of primal force."

"And outside the boxing ring?" persisted Bobby. "Have you given any thought to what we were discussing earlier?"

"Some," answered Cartright.

"And?"

"I suppose we should discuss it further."

"Excellent, my friend!" said Bobby, signaling a waiter.

"Have another cognac."

"I don't mind if I do," said Cartright, holding out his glass while the uniformed jason carefully filled it.

"And what shall we toast?" asked Bobby.

"That seems obvious," answered Cartright. "To Gama Labu. I expect to hear a lot more of him in the future."

"Oh, I'm sure you will," said Emperor Bobby.

*I hope not, thought Beddoes.*

#### 4.

The Republic gave Faligor thirty years in which to raise its productivity and economy and literacy rate to the level at which it would be invited to join as a full member, following the necessary plebiscite among its inhabitants. Emperor Bobby thought it was far too long; Beddoes thought it was half a century too short; but Cartright, who had negotiated it with his superiors in the government, thought it was just about right, and so the decree came down.

Despite Bobby's impatience, a lot of work remained to be done to prepare Faligor for its entry into the Republic as a free and independent world, and first on the agenda was the formation of a planetary government. Given the literacy rate, an election would have been counterproductive, so Cartright, upon the advice of his aides, decreed that the Sitate Robert August Tantram II was the provisional president of the world. Free to form his own cabinet, Bobby filled the sixteen positions with one member each of the Traja, the Rizzali, and the Bolimbo, and thirteen Enkoti.

It was at that point that Cartright intervened and insisted upon a more equitable distribution of political power. Bobby countered, not unreasonably, that if Cartright could find, for example, a Rizzali or a Traja who knew more about agricultural production or economics than his Secretaries of Agriculture and the Treasury, he would be happy to replace them. They laboriously went through a list compiled by the other tribes, and finally came up with a cabinet composed of ten Enkoti and six non-Enkoti.

This did not sit well with the other tribes, but then Cartright and Bobby made a joint pronouncement that within five years the cabinet would be representative of the population as a whole, and that in the meantime it was essential that the tribes send their best and their brightest to the university in Romulus. And, since it had

been decreed not only by the President, but even more importantly, by the Men who gave him his orders, they had no choice but to comply.

The next problem was the moles, which proved not to be a problem at all. Most of them had signed three- or five-year contracts, and when the contracts were up, about half of them elected not to renew them, though most of them chose to remain on the planet, and many sent for their families (which, in mole society, could number up to fifty). At first Cartright feared that supporting them would put an unnecessary financial burden on the planet and cause resentment among the jasons, but the moles had no intention of not supporting themselves, or of competing with the jasons for various menial jobs. With the advent of a monetized economy, there was an urgent need for shopkeepers, and the moles soon were entrenched as Faligor's merchant class, setting up shops in all the major population centers and even out in the hinterlands, importing goods not just from their own world but from many of the nearby worlds of the Republic, and indeed forming the tax base from which the planetary government drew most of its revenues. They were a serious, industrious race, and as the jasons, faced with the absence of a barter economy, began applying for work in the mines, more and more of the moles joined their brethren in the merchant sector.

As tourism boomed, the last few private hunting preserves were banned, and off-worlders arrived with nothing but holographic cameras instead of weapons. The five major game reserves, run primarily by fanatically dedicated Men and assisted by jasons, soon began pulling business away from Peponi and even Serengeti. Luxury lodges accommodated the visitors, and it was said that there was no planet in the galaxy that could match the richness of Faligor's wildlife.

Bobby began spending more time on other worlds, ostensibly to solicit investment in Faligor, though he spent more time playing than working, but as Cartright noted, it was probably for the best, since it forced the government to function without him, and he had never been overly interested in the workings of government to begin with.

And, a handful of years after they left the planet for schooling within the Republic, a number of the jasons returned home. Most of them were Enkoti, but a few of them weren't, and of that few, the most brilliant of them was a middle-aged jason who had taken the human name of William to go with his tribal name of Barioke. He was a Rizzali, and unlike most of the others of his race, he had gone to school not on a human world, but rather on the world of Canphor VI, which over the millennia had revolted three different times against human rule, and was currently the leader of a loosely knit federation of nonhuman worlds that had ceased all intercourse with the Republic.

Whereas Emperor Bobby wanted nothing more than to join the Republic as a full partner, William Barioke wanted total independence from the Republic. He had no intention of turning down any aid the Republic might continue to give, he didn't want to break off relations with it, but he found the status of Protectorate to be demeaning, and the advantages of being a member world to be mini-

mal. He had made contacts within the Canphorites, and saw no reason not to deal with both sides; he would let the Republic and the Canphor Federation bid for his loyalty (which, as he explained to his people, was never for sale, a fact that he felt would in no way inhibit the bidding).

The one thing on which Barioke and Bobby were in total agreement was that Men had totally underestimated their ability to handle their own affairs. Barioke saw no reason to allow Men to assist in the running of Faligor's affairs. After all, he argued, the ultimate goal of everyone involved, whether the planet became a member of the Republic or an independent entity, was self-rule, and the sooner it was begun the better. He lobbied the Rizzali, he lobbied the rest of the jasons, he lobbied the Men who lived and worked on the planet, he even lobbied the moles—but most of all, he lobbied Emperor Bobby.

Finally, Bobby agreed to make two public appearances with Barioke, in both of which he gave his approval to the notion of immediate self-rule, which was followed by Barioke's impassioned oratory. It was after the second rally that Beddoes requested an audience with him.

It took her a week to be ushered into his presence, since he had been spending the intervening days partying on nearby Beta Lemoris III, but finally she found herself sitting across a desk from the Emperor, who looked none the worse for wear for all the traveling he had done lately. From the paintings and holographs on the wall, the shape of the desk and chairs, the carpeting on the floor, she would never have guessed that she was in an alien's office had she not known otherwise.

"How nice to see you again, Susan," said Bobby, his golden fur rippling as he shot her an ingratiating smile. "How goes your insect collecting?"

*I'll give you this: you're every inch a politician, she thought, not without a touch of admiration.*

"Arthur Cartright has asked me to speak to you, your majesty," she replied.

"And how is my old friend Arthur doing?" he asked. "I haven't seen him for months."

"He's very busy these days," she replied. "We've opened up another dozen mining worlds this year."

"Tell him to come to Faligor for a vacation," suggested Bobby.

"Faligor is never far from his mind," answered Beddoes.

"In fact, I'm here at his request."

"Ah," he said, and suddenly his face looked more like an unhappy puppy than a jason or a Man. "The speeches."

"He feels that you're giving your people expectations that cannot be realized," said Beddoes.

"Ever?" asked Bobby sharply.

"In the immediate future," said Beddoes. "Furthermore, you have aligned yourself with a very capable politician who has no desire whatsoever to join the Republic."

"He's just a Rizzali rabble-rouser," replied Bobby, with a shrug—unique to his species—that started at his cranium and slowly rippled his golden fleece all the way down to his three-toed feet.

"Then why associate with him?"

"Because he's a very popular rabble-rouser, and I am the President of *all* my people."

"He is very dangerous, your majesty," said Beddoes.

"I have every intention of assimilating him into my government, where he will be given some official function and never be heard from again," Bobby assured her. "But in the meantime, he and I happen to agree that things are moving too slowly. We really should not have to come to you, hat in hands, to beg for self-rule. We had it before you landed on our planet. We never gave it away, so why should we have to debase ourselves to get it back?"

"I fail to see how educating your people, expanding your economy, vaccinating your children, and showing you how best to make use of your natural resources constitutes debasement," said Beddoes.

"I don't doubt that you fail to see it," responded Bobby. "Probably this is because no one has ever given your race orders."

"Everything we have suggested—and we have *suggested*, not *ordered*—has been for Faligor's benefit, your majesty."

"Nevertheless, we resent being denied self-rule. On that point, Barioke and I think as one."

"It is possible that the length of time you remain a protectorate can be shortened," said Beddoes, "but not if you ally yourself with Barioke."

"He is a very astute political thinker," said Bobby.

"He's too smart by half."

"He frightens you, does he?" asked Bobby, amused.

"Nothing frightens the Republic," answered Susan.

"But he should frighten *you*, your majesty."

Bobby laughed again. "He is just a Rizzali."

"You know that the size of the Rizzali army has tripled since he returned from the Canphor system."

"All of the countries of Faligor have armies," said Bobby dismissively.

"Why?" asked Beddoes. "The jasons only own seven spaceships, and four of them are yours. What worlds do you plan to go to war with?"

"Let me assuage your doubts, Susan," said Bobby with a smile. "The armies are just for show, and to protect our territorial borders. As for the Rizzali army, it is a joke, commanded by the biggest clown of all."

"Prego Katora is no clown," Beddoes pointed out. "He graduated from one of the finest military academies on Deluros VIII."

"Prego Katora no longer commands the Rizzali army," answered Bobby.

"No?"

"Do you remember the boxing match I sponsored some time back?"

"Yes," said Beddoes warily. "What of it?"

"Do you remember Gama Labu, the jason who beat your champion?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is Labu, with the body of a self-indulgent giant and the intellect of a child, who is now in charge of Barioke's army." Bobby threw back his head and laughed.

"Labu, who cannot even spell his name! If you were to tell him the enemy was gathering to the east, he would probably launch an attack on the Hills of Heaven. *Now* do you see why Barioke does not worry me?"

"I think you have more to fear than you realize, your majesty," said Beddoes sincerely.

"Because of Labu?" he said disbelievingly.

"There is something frightening about him," said Beddoes. "Something alien."

"Am I not an alien to you?" asked Bobby, amused.

"We are different species, but we hold certain basic principles in common. I think there is something about Gama Labu that is alien to all those things that we both cherish."

"And you base this on the fact that you saw him beat a human fighter in the ring?"

She shook her head. "No," she said slowly. "It is just a feeling I have about him."

"He is a clown," reasserted Bobby. "A great big clown. Always telling jokes, always drinking, always laughing loudest when he is the object of other people's jokes. He became a hero overnight when he defeated Billy Wycynski, and that doubtless caused his elevation to his current position, but nothing could be better for my purposes. In effect, it renders the Rizzali army useless. I will appropriate as much of William Barioke's support as I can, elevate him to a government position where I can control him, disband his army, and steer my people on a swift course that will culminate in self-rule."

"I think you are making a serious mistake, your majesty."

Bobby chuckled. "The day I can't control William Barioke is the day I'll retire from office and devote myself to a life of parties and sports."

*I hope you'll tell us when it happens, so we'll know the difference,* thought Beddoes caustically. Aloud, she said, "I cannot overstress the seriousness of the situation, your majesty."

"Certainly you can," said Bobby. "In fact, you already have."

"Arthur Cartright has empowered me to say that we will not support your alliance with Barioke, or your attempt to speed up the carefully planned schedule for self-rule."

"Of course he'll support us," said Bobby. "Faligor is his noble experiment, the shining example upon which he has staked his reputation. How would it look if I toured the Republic complaining about the Department of Cartography's repression, or turned Gama Labu loose on your handful of military advisors, always assuming that he could find them?" Bobby grinned. "What would he do then, Susan? Call for the Navy he so despises to pacify us, as they have pacified so many other worlds?" He paused. "Arthur has his deadlines, and I have mine—and on my world, mine take precedence. I think Arthur had better get used to the idea that Faligor will be ruling itself within the next two years."

Beddoes stared at him silently, thinking about what she had heard.

"Come, come, Susan," he said easily. "Have you nothing to say?"

"I'm in an awkward position, your majesty," she replied. "I have delivered Arthur Cartright's message to you. To say anything further would be to exceed my authority." She paused, undecided. "And yet I have some things I very much want to say."

"I will consider all remarks to be confidential," answered Bobby.

She considered his offer for a moment, then sighed. "All right," she said. "You have us over a barrel, your majesty. Under no circumstances will Cartright call in the Navy. If you push for immediate self-rule hard enough, he'll have to agree to it."

"Your words will not leave my office," Bobby assured her. "No one will ever claim that Susan Beddoes was the first Man to yield to our demands."

She shook her head. "I don't care if *that* leaves your office or not. The truth of it is self-evident. You know and I know and Arthur knows that he won't use force against you."

"Then what is it you wished to say?" asked Bobby. Beddoes again considered keeping silent, but finally decided to speak. "You are doubtless going to have a planetary vote on self-rule," she began.

"Certainly."

"And it will win overwhelmingly."

"I would assume so."

"Your first order of business will be to elect a planetary government," she continued, "and I assume you will be running for the Presidency."

"That is my intention," said Bobby.

"If there is any chance whatsoever that William Barioke will run against you," she said, staring directly into his eyes, "I think you should do everything in your power to see that such an eventuality does not come to pass."

"You make it sound positively sinister," said Bobby, once again amused. "Would you care to define 'everything'?"

"I would not, your majesty. I would merely urge it."

Bobby got to his feet, signifying that the meeting was over.

"I am the acting President of Faligor, descended from three hundred sinites," he said, walking her to the ornate door of his office. "William Barioke is merely a Rizzali whom I have chosen to use for my own political ends. Still," he added, "I thank you for your concern. When the election is over, I will remember who my friends are."

"I just hope you remember who your enemies are before the election is held," said Beddoes sincerely.

## 5.

The election was held twenty-two months later. The people of Faligor, as expected, voted overwhelmingly for self-rule.

Despite Cartography's opposition—or possibly because of it—William Barioke was elected President over Robert August Tantram II by a margin of fifty-three percent to forty-seven percent. As a gesture of goodwill and solidarity, the winner created the office of Prime Minister for the loser.

And Susan Beddoes took a long look at the rolling grassy plains outside her window and the fog-shrouded Hills of Heaven off in the distance, and decided that it was time to think of leaving the Diamond of the Outer Frontier and returning to the worlds of the Republic.

There were problems right from the start.

Since Emperor Bobby had erected enough modern buildings in Romulus to house a government, William Barioko, rather than spending the money to build a new capitol, simply appropriated Romulus for his own. Within a month of the election, the opera house had been converted into the parliament, the theater into the High Court, the two largest tourist hotels into government offices, and Bobby's own house became the Presidential Mansion.

Soon Romulus, which had been populated almost exclusively by Men and Enkoti, was overrun with members of the Rizzali, most of whom were working for the government. Bobby protested to Arthur Cartright, who explained that the emperor had insisted on self-rule and would now have to live with the consequences of his actions.

After a few months of lobbying without success, Bobby decided to move the prime minister's offices to Remus, some fifty miles away. He paid for a new mansion with his own funds, but managed to raise the money for a new theater and sports complex from Men and moles, and within less than a year Remus had replaced Romulus as the cultural center of Faligor, and most of the commerce moved there as well.

As the Men and moles followed the Enkoti's exodus from Romulus, the capitol began falling into a state of disrepair. Barioko spent a fruitless three months urging them to move back, and then appropriated Remus for the government as well.

Bobby, who understood how government worked, went to the press and vehemently protested—but Barioko, who understood how *power* worked, simply shut down those segments of the media that presented the prime minister's case. Then the president took to the airwaves—everywhere but in the heartland of the Enkoti—and explained that he was the president of *all* the jasons, and that he would never agree to the Enkoti demand for special treatment. If the prime minister would not abide by the constitution, he concluded, then he would reluctantly have to remove him from office.

Bobby countered by holding a huge rally at the recently constructed sports arena in Remus. Forty thousand Enkoti and Men filled the seats, and after a few lesser Enkoti officials addressed the crowd, Bobby himself stood before the microphones.

"I will not stand by and watch my people being systematically robbed by a government that has sworn to eradicate tribalism and favoritism," he announced. "Where in the constitution does it say that entire cities can be appropriated by executive fiat or, even worse, by executive whim? Where does it say that the president can deny the prime minister access to the media? The Enkoti don't ask for special treatment, but merely for *fair* treatment—and if we cannot get it from William Barioko, then we shall present our case to the Republic."

During the applause that followed, Bobby scanned the faces at the front of the audience, and stopped when he came to a huge jason in a military uniform.

"I see that Barioko has sent his general here to listen to what I have to say," he continued. "And doubtless to report every word back to him." He paused and smiled. "Are the words I'm using too big for you, General Labu?" he asked sarcastically.

The audience laughed, none more loudly than Gama Labu himself.

"Perhaps you would like to come up onto the platform and tell us what you are doing here?" said Bobby.

Labu, accompanied by his own personal translator, got to his feet and climbed the small set of stairs with his ungainly stride.

"I am not political," he said, speaking in Maringo and obviously uncomfortable before such a large audience. "We are all jasons, and I will never hold a grudge against another of my kind. I am a soldier, so I go where my president sends me, but I have no opinion in these matters."

"And what will you tell your president?" demanded Bobby when the translator had finished.

Labu grinned. "That the arena food is not very good, but the human beer is excellent!"

The tension was diffused by a burst of laughter. Labu smiled and waved to the crowd, then took his seat and listened as Bobby concluded his tirade.

The next morning Labu was back, with five hundred soldiers, to place the prime minister under house arrest.

The first person Bobby sent for was Arthur Cartright, who showed up half an hour later and found his way blocked by Labu himself.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Cartright. "I have been summoned here by the prime minister."

Labu shrugged, a grotesque gesture for an alien with his enormous bulk.

"Thank you very much," he said with a smile.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Thank you very much," repeated Labu.

Then Cartright remembered that the jason was uncomfortable with Terran, quite possibly illiterate in it, and he switched to the Maringo dialect.

"What is going on here?" he said.

"I am simply following my orders," replied Labu.

"You were ordered to arrest the prime minister and confine him to his house?" said Cartright. "Why?"

Labu shrugged again. "I have no idea," he said. "I am sure it must be a mistake, and will soon be corrected."

"Does the president know about this?"

"He is the one who issued the order," replied Labu with a huge grin.

Cartright paused and stared at Labu for a moment. "The prime minister has sent for me," he said at last. "May I please pass through your lines?"

"Of course, friend Cartright," said Labu. "We are great friends, are we not?"

"I don't know," said Cartright. "Are we?"

"Of course, of course," said Labu, thumping him on the back. "I have no enemies."

"That must be a great comfort," said Cartright.

Labu laughed uproariously, as if Cartright had just made a joke, then stepped aside and signaled his men to let the human through. A moment later another uniformed jason

escorted him into the mansion and up to the door of Bobby's bedroom. The door slid open long enough for Cartright to step inside the room, then closed behind him.

"Arthur!" said Bobby, rising from a huge desk where he had been scribbling something in longhand. "I am so glad you came!"

"What's happened?" asked Cartright. "I got your message, and I arrived to find your house surrounded by the army."

"I don't know!" said Bobby. "They haven't charged me with anything—but they won't let me leave!"

"Last night's speech didn't exactly endear you to your enemies," said Cartright. "Let me contact Barioke and see what we can work out."

"Thank you."

Cartright left the prime minister's home and returned to his office, where he called Barioke on the vidphone. After twenty minutes of being transferred from one bureaucrat to another, he was finally connected to the lean, conservatively attired president.

"Good morning, Mr. Cartright," said Barioke. "I've been expecting to hear from you."

"Then you must know why I'm calling, Mr. President."

"Certainly."

There was a long pause.

"Well?" said Cartright.

"Well what, Mr. Cartright?"

"Why has he been arrested?"

"He has not been arrested," replied Barioke. "No charges have been made."

"Then why has he been confined to his quarters by the head of your army?"

"Because I don't know what to do with him, and I am keeping him there until I can decide."

"That's illegal!"

"Would you be happier if I charge him with treason?" asked Barioke mildly. "I have every right to, you know."

"He's broken no laws."

"He threatened to disobey a presidential edict," said Barioke, "and he did it in front of forty thousand witnesses. Left to his own devices, I am sure he will eventually urge the Enkoti to rebel against the planetary government and set up their own separate state."

"You can't arrest him because of what you think he *might* do!" said Cartright.

"Do you think it would be wiser to wait until he had completely discredited the duly elected government?" asked Barioke sardonically.

"I think the two of you should get together and sort out your differences," said Cartright. "I will be happy to act as a mediator if you feel one is necessary."

"I think not," said Barioke. He paused and turned his piercing eyes full upon Cartright's image in his vidscreen. "Let us understand one another, Mr. Cartright. *You* are the one who did not wish my planet to obtain self-rule for another quarter of a century. You are the one who has constantly favored the Enkoti in all things. You are the one who made that irresponsible, game-playing spend-thrift the interim president. You are the one who urged your fellow Men to erect their buildings and start their

businesses on Enkoti land. And now you are urging me to deal with an Enkoti who has publicly condemned my government. You are not my friend, Mr. Cartright. I am trying to unify this world, and you are hindering me every bit as much as the prime minister, perhaps more."

"That is a very one-sided statement of the facts," responded Cartright. "Robert August Tantram was elected prime minister by your people, not mine."

"In point of fact, he was defeated by my people, and appointed to a meaningless office by *me*," said Barioke. "In retrospect, it was a mistake. He has opposed me at every turn."

"He has only requested that you not appropriate the private property of the Enkoti for governmental use."

"He does not request; he demands. And I should point out that the prime minister and his tribe possessed the property we have confiscated only because of the favored treatment his father and brother received at the hands of your race. You literally threw money at them, Mr. Cartright. They did nothing to earn it, except to give you a free hand to use our world as your department's grand social experiment."

"I resent the implication!" said Cartright. "We have helped elevate *all* the jasons. Our medical clinics have been constructed in every tribal homeland, our teachers have gone into the most remote areas, our—"

"But always you have begun with the Enkoti," interrupted Barioke. "You make it sound as if I wish to enslave them, Mr. Cartright. All I wish to do is redress the inequities and unify all the inhabitants of Faligor. No Enkoti will suffer during my rule."

"What kind of impression do you think you're making on the Enkoti right now, with hundreds of soldiers surrounding the prime minister's residence?"

"A momentary disruption, nothing more," said Barioke. "If he will publicly apologize for attacking the government and swear fealty to it, all will be forgiven."

"And if not?"

"Then I shall have to charge him with treason."

"That's ridiculous!" snapped Cartright.

"I realize that you and I have honest disagreements, Mr. Cartright," said Barioke, "but I cannot permit you to address me like that."

"I apologize, Mr. President," said Cartright, struggling to control his temper. "But I helped draft your constitution. It guarantees freedom of speech, and all that the prime minister did last night was exercise that right."

"I have studied your laws, Mr. Cartright," said Barioke, still unperturbed, "and I think you and I both know that freedom of speech is not an absolute, that there are circumstances under which it can and indeed must be restricted."

"Voicing an honest opinion about the government is not one of them."

"And if it is his honest opinion that the government must be overthrown by force, or that the Enkoti must secede, is *that* protected by our constitution?"

"He did not urge anyone to secede or use force," said Cartright. "I was there."

"There were nuances and implications," said Barioke.



"You don't charge someone with treason because of nuances."

"This is getting us nowhere, Mr. Cartright," said Barioke. "If you will give me your word that he will make no further public statements, the army will withdraw immediately and his freedom will be restored."

"Let me speak to him."

"Certainly," replied Barioke. A small smile crossed his face. "He is not, after all, going anywhere."

Cartright broke the connection and immediately called Bobby.

"What did Barioke say?" asked Bobby the moment he looked at his screen and saw that he was speaking to Cartright.

"He says that if you'll promise not to criticize the government again, he won't press any charges."

"And the army?"

"They'll withdraw."

"We've created a tyrant, Arthur. The Republic has to do something about him."

"I don't know exactly what the Republic *can* do," replied Cartright. "You're no longer a protectorate, and you're not yet a member. You're an independent world."

"You've got to get them to apply economic pressure," continued Bobby. "If he can do this to me, he can do it to anyone who speaks out. He's not always going to have Gama Labu in charge of the army; the next commander could be a serious threat to the populace." He paused. "Why is he doing this, Arthur?"

"He has his reasons," answered Cartright. "I don't think they're valid, but I'm willing to believe that he does. I think the best thing to do is to try to set up a meeting between the two of you."

"Do you think he'll do it?"

"Not if you don't promise to stop criticizing him in public."

Bobby lowered his head in thought for a moment, then looked up and bared his teeth in a very alien grin. "Tell him he's got a deal."

"I mean it," said Cartright. "And more to the point, *he* means it. If you speak out against him again, I can't protect you."

"I won't say anything against him," answered Bobby. "You have my word on that."

"All right," said Cartright. "I'll call him and tell him you've agreed to his terms, then see what I can do about arranging a meeting."

Two hours later Bobby was freed.

Four days later, President William Barioke refused to meet with him.

One week later, Bobby gave another speech. This time he never mentioned Barioke by name, but made an impassioned argument that it was time for Faligor to apply for full membership in the Republic, that only the Republic could assure that no tyrant ever ruled the planet, and that he himself planned to travel to the Deluros system to present his case.

The next morning, Gama Labu led his five hundred men down the streets of Remus toward Bobby's home. When they got within three hundred yards, they were met by gunfire from an army of two thousand Enkoti warriors.

Labu retreated half a mile, sent for reinforcements, joked with the press and onlookers while awaiting them, explained once more that he was simply a soldier carrying out his orders and that the politics of the situation were beyond him, and then stormed the mansion.

Twenty minutes later Robert August Tantram II, the 302nd Sitate of the Enkoti, and two thousand of his followers, lay dead in the ashes of his mansion. Before sunset, they were buried outside of town in a mass grave.

That evening William Barioke announced that the constitution would be suspended for a period of three months, while a better document, one that would never allow a traitor to rise to the rank of prime minister, was drafted and implemented.

And Arthur Cartright sat by his video, listening to the news and wondering what he could have done differently, and trying to determine exactly what had gone wrong. ♦

# AMAZING<sup>®</sup> STORIES

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If you like what you've seen in this issue of AMAZING<sup>®</sup> Stories, there's more where it came from. We have a small selection of back issues dating from the 1970s, plus almost every magazine from May 1990 through August 1993, available for purchase by mail order. The list on this page and the facing page mentions every magazine that's for sale, and gives a few of the stories you'll find in each one.

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**July 1990:** *Harvest* by Kristine Kathryn Rusch; *The Secret of Life* by David Brin; *Sequoia Dreams* by Sheila Finch

**September 1990:** *Harlem Nova* by Paul Di Filippo; *At Vega's Taqueria* by Richard A. Lupoff; *Whoso Lost to Hunt* by Susan Shwartz

**November 1990:** *When the Ship Comes In* by R. Garcia y Robertson; *Guamand Performance* by Kathie Kopa; *Behind the Eyes of Dreamers* by Pamela Sargent

**January 1991:** *Stranger Sins* (Part One) by George Zebrowski, *A Pinning Lesson* by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, *Life in a Drop of Pond Water* by Bruce Bethke

**March 1991:** *Dog's Life* by Martha Soukup; *The Dragon of Aller* by John Brunner, *Stranger Sins* (Conclusion) by George Zebrowski

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**July 1991:** *Except My Life, Except My Life, Except My Life* by John Morressy, *Arms and the Woman* by James Morrow, *The Perfect Hero* by Elizabeth Moon

**August 1991:** *Fantasies* by Michael Swartwick and Tim Sullivan; *The Number of the Sand* by George Zebrowski; *The Face of the Waters* by Robert Silverberg

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